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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Glory of the Almighty God.

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ADEGOKE, KAZEEM ADEKUNLE (Ph.D)**Introduction**

Islam literally means an act of total submission or surrendering to the Will of Allah (God). Historically, the origin of Islam hanged on two theories namely conservative and modern theories. In the conservative theory, the origin of Islam could be traced to the time of Prophet Adam and his wife, Hawwa' (Eve) who were the first created mankind on earth. This theory propounded that Islam started when mankind were conscious of the existence of a Supreme Being Who is Allah and they submit themselves to His Will. The modern theory claims that Islam started in 610 C.E when Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was called to prophethood in the Mecca city and was commanded to spread the message of Islam.¹

The first contact of Islam in West Africa came up in the eight century of the Christian Era when the religion began to walk its way across the trans-Sahara trade route from North Africa to West Africa. Not long after the Arab Muslim conquerors had over-run the whole North Africa, they began to organize military expedition into the southern region of Morroco and as far south as the boundaries of ancient Ghana. This expedition was spear-headed by the then governor of Ifriqiyyah, Ubaydullah Ibn Habib. This expedition returned to North Africa with large numbers of slave and large quantities of gold.² It was this slave and gold supplies that prompted the governor to find ways and means of getting more of this

precious commodities from West Africa. To this effect, the then Umayyad Caliph of Islamic empire, Caliph Abdur-Rahman ordered the governor of Ifriqiyyah in 745 C.E to do well along the trade routes leading from southern Morocco across the western Sahara to West Africa.³

The next contact of Islam in West Africa came up through the vehicle of Berber Muslim merchants who came to various cities in West Africa purposely to buy and sell their materials to the people. These Berber merchants showed their interests in trading with West Africans as they were attracted with plentiful supplies of commodities such as gold, slaves and food stuffs in return for cloth, salt and horses. Among the commercial centres which sprang up along these trade routes from the eighth century onwards were Tahert in Algeria, Sijilmasa in Morocco, Wangara, Takedda and Awdaghost in ancient Ghana. Apart from this, West African merchants were also in contact with both the Sanhaja and the Muslim merchants from North Africa that by the late ninth and tenth century. Some of the West Africans had begun to establish Muslim quarters in the capitals of West African states of Gao, Ancient Ghana and Tekrur.⁴

It could be rightly pointed out at this juncture that the realization of North African Berber merchants that West Africa was a land of gold and commercial centres attracted large numbers of Muslim merchants and consequently spread the religion of Islam among the West Africans.

Factors Responsible for the Spread of Islam in West Africa

Islam in many ways is attractive to the West African people because of certain privileges it conferred on its adherents such as fraternal brotherhood, full citizenship, freedom and exemption from taxes and tributes. It is an abomination for Muslim soldiers to either raid or enslave fellow Muslims irrespective of their race, colour, language and cultural background. Islam did not condemn or eradicate some social institutions in West African milieu such as polygamy and family bonds. Rather, it encouraged and modified them where the situation call for amendment and adjustment.⁵

The Muslim missionaries in West Africa maintained cordial and good relationship with their followers. They did

not only profess equality before Allah but also practised and demonstrated it in their clothing, diet, social norms and housing. Apart from this, the Muslim missionaries had practical solutions to the spiritual and physical problems confronting their followers. They used to give their followers concrete materials in form of concoction, amulets, wrapped Arabic written materials which have extra-ordinary power and could neutralize any evil forces. The Jihad embarked upon by some of these Muslim missionaries who were soldiers between eighth and nineteenth century of Christian era for the purpose of spreading, propagating and reforming Islam in West Africa also assisted in the spread of Islam.⁶

Islam had special appeal and respect for the rulers of most of the West African cities. This is the main reason why majority of these rulers popularized Islam and made it a state religion in their domains. They even went to the extent of appointing some Islamic clerics as administrators, judges, counselors, viziers and secretaries in the royal courts.⁷

Islam was associated with several achievements and civilization in West African cities when it was introduced. It was associated with the trans-sahara trade, schooling and education, introduction of fire-arms, the introduction of oriental architecture and civilization, the oriental mode of dressing and pilgrimage.⁸

Advent of Islam in some Ancient West African States

Islam got to ancient Ghana empire in the eleventh century through the Muslim merchants from Awdaghost, which serves as an entry spot of trans-Saharan trade to Ghana. Awdaghost which was formerly under the rule of Sanhaja Berbers was conquered by Ghana empire and annexed to her domain and this assisted the spread of Islam in the empire. The peak of the matter was the conquest of Ghana empire by the militant Muslim group popularly known as the Almoravids in 1076 A.D.⁹

Islam came to Mali empire in the eleventh century. It was reported that the then ruler of Mali, Sundiata got converted to Islam after the prayer of some Muslim clerics that put an end to the prolonged drought in Mali empire.

Islam spread more during the reign of Mansa Musa between 1312 and 1332. His pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 boosted Islam as it offered Mali empire the opportunity to open diplomatic relations with the states of North Africa. Apart from this, it attracted to Mali more traders and Muslim scholars who contributed to the economic, social and cultural development of the empire.¹⁰

Islam had been in Songhai in the ninth century but it was not popular until the fifteenth century during the reign of Muhammad Toure known as Askia, the Great between 1493 and 1528. His pilgrimage to Mecca in 1495 also boosted the spread of Islam in Songhai as he was made the head of the Muslims in West Africa by the then Caliph of Cairo. He conquered several territories for Islam and established diplomatic relations with some North African states. He compiled Islamic code of laws and trained Muslim judges to interpret the new code. Islam got to old Kanem-Borno empire in the eleventh century during the reign of Mai Umme Jilmi between 1085 and 1097. He himself became a Muslim and declared Islam as an official religion of the empire. Islam was boosted in the sixteenth century during the reign of Mai Idris Alooma.¹¹

Islam later got to Hausaland through old Kanem Borno empire in the fourteenth century, and by the fifteenth century, various traditional rulers of Hausaland had begun to apply Islamic principles in the administration of their states. Out of enthusiasm to reform Islam from syncretism, Uthman Ibn Fudi, popularly known as Usman Dan Fodio led the 1804 Jihad in the whole Hausaland. From Hausaland, Islam spread to the Yorubaland in the sixteenth century of the Christian era.¹²

Islamic Reformation in West Africa

In the nineteenth century of the Christian era, various attempts were made by different Islamic Scholars to purify Islam from paganistic indigenous traditional religions of West African people. Prior to these Jihads in some West African states, Islam had been mixed with paganism that it was hardly difficult to distinguish Islam from paganistic traditional faith of the people. This adverse development did extend to the various

traditional rulers whose powers and authority were exercised on the people through the full participation in the pagan rites and ceremonies.¹³ Out of these Islamic reformations in West Africa, three of them are notable and will be briefly highlighted in this study.

Fulani Jihad of Uthman Ibn Fudi

The Fulani Jihad was spear-headed by Uthman Ibn Fudi who was born in Maratta in 1754. This Jihad came up in 1804. The zeal for the Jihad was motivated by one of the teachers of Uthman Ibn Fudi, Jubril Al-Kunti. As an Islamic Scholar, he started his career as an itinerant teacher and preacher in Zamfara, Kebbi, Degel and some places in Hausaland. The primary aim of his embarking on Jihad in Hausaland was to reform and purify Islam from being mixed with paganism. Uthman Ibn Fudi took it upon himself to establish the way of life according to the Islamic law, Shari'ah which regulates the social, political, economic and religious aspects of a Muslim. Within a decade of this Fulani Jihad, it had spread its tentacles to the nooks and crannies of the Hausaland. Despite the fact that the Fulani Jihad was said to have been motivated by various reasons examined below, it was a successful enterprise since the remnant of this Jihad is still surviving till this contemporary time which is the Sokoto caliphate and headship of Nigerian Muslims.¹⁴

Jihad of Shehu Ahmad of Masina

This Jihad was spear-headed by Shehu Ahmad who was born in Masina in 1775 from the clan of Sangare. He received his Islamic education in his home town at Masina. He left Masina and traveled to Hausaland where he became one of the lieutenants of Uthman Ibn Fudi in 1805. He later settled at Jenne where he started his career as preacher and teacher. But he could not stay there for long before he was expelled from Jenne as a result of his strict position against syncretism. He fled to Sebera where he gathered a large group of devout followers who assisted him in his Jihad activities against paganism and syncretism. He died in 1844.¹⁵

Jihad of Al-Hajj Umar

This *Jihad* was spear-headed by 'Umar Ibn Sa'id Tal who was born in Futa Toro in 1794. He went to Makkah for hajj rite between 1820 and 1838. He later settled at Futa Jallon where he made preparations for his *Jihad*. He fled to Dinguiray where it was reported that he received the divine call to declare Jihad in 1848. He belonged to *Tijaniyyah* brotherhood. The main purpose of his Jihad was to impose his doctrines and litanies on the people. He subjected his conquered towns to the ideology of *Tijaniyyah* before he was killed in 1864 while waging war against the *Qadiriyyah* brotherhood in Masina.¹⁶

Motives Behind the Islamic Reformation in West African States

There are several motives behind the Islamic reformation in West African states as could be gleaned below:

Religious Motive

Islamic reformation in West Africa was religiously moved by some sincerely committed Islamic reformers who aimed to purify Islam from pagan practices. With this aim, these Islamic reformers who had better understanding of Islam decided to embark on this reformation so as to bring the Muslims back to pristine traditional Islam practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) in the early seventh century. Some of these reformers were erudite Islamic Scholars of high repute and were known for their inspiring sermon and writings in the various fields of Islamic sciences. As a result of this development, it is better for these reformers to establish an Islamic law, Shari'ah to govern the way of life of the people. In addition, some of these reformers believed that it had been predicted by the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) that every century would bring up new religious reformer who would reform Islam among the various peoples of the world. This outstanding Islamic tradition made the followers of these reformers to regard them as sincere and charismatic leaders of the Muslim world.¹⁷

Political Motive

Islamic reformation could also be said to be politically

motivated as some of these reformers embarked upon these reformation so as to gain political powers and authority from some West African states. The undisputed fact of supporting this assertion was the sack and attacks of some of the then Muslim states such as Borno and Zamfara. It should be noted that Islam got to Hausaland through the Kanem-Borno as previously stated in this work. The unwavering support of Zamfara at the initial stage of the Islamic reformation could not be underrated in the history of Fulani Jihad. Apart from this fact, all the conquered West African states were subjected to become vassal states under Fulani sovereignty.¹⁸

Ethnic Motive

Furthermore, Islamic reformation could be said to be ethnic motivated as some of the followers of these reformers joined them not because they saw them as religious leaders but out of sympathy that some of them were victims of the jealousy of some West African traditional rulers who did not want to see them in their domain due to their religious inclinations. This was considered as tribal insult by the people from their own tribe who critically assessed the incident as a tribal harassment. As a result of this, they rallied around some of these reformers out of tribal zeal.¹⁹

Economic Motive

The Islamic reformation could also be linked to the economic motive of some West African people who felt that some West African rulers had subjected them to abject poverty and human assault due to the over-taxation they were subjected to. Some of these aggrieved people regarded the Jihad as an opportunity for reform and social change, which were long over-due. Apart from this, some of the centres of this Islamic reformation became business centres in West African states such as Sokoto, Masina, Jenne and Futa Jallon.²⁰

Impacts of Islam on West African States

Advent of Islam in West Africa can not be over-emphasized in term of the notable impacts that it makes in

the sub-region. Some of these impacts are going to be examined in this passage:

Religious Impact

African Traditional Religion are the religion of West African people before the advent of Islam in West Africa. African Traditional religion is the sum total of the ways of life of the African people. It is the indigenous religion of African forefathers.²¹ Their forms of worship include worship of divinities, ancestors, spirits, gods and goddesses. Islam eradicated all these primitive religious practices in some areas while they were minimized in other areas in West African milieu. As soon as Islam got to West Africa, it wielded its adherents together under one God known as Allah, and single universal brotherhood and unity which replaced old traditional religious diversity in the continent. Islam was declared as a state religion in some West African states and it regulates their ways of life according to Islamic law (Shari'ah).²²

Social and Cultural Impact

Advent of Islam in West Africa made a notable landmark in the social life of the West African people. Prior to the advent of Islam in West Africa, people had their own comprehensive way of life such as human inter-relations (family and tribal ties), festivities and ceremonies (marriage, naming, burial rite and festivals). Islam eradicated and modified some of these social ways of life as they are coloured and nurtured with Islamic principles. This is highly notable in the marriage, naming and burial rites in some West African states. Culturally, Islam introduced new form of dressing and greeting and architectural design into West African states which have now become traditional in the continent. For instance, white robes, long kaftan and turban are worn freely by Muslims in the West African states. Similarly, the features of Arabian architecture appear in many building such as mosques and palaces of Emirs till today.²³

Economic Impact

Islam initially followed trade to the West African states

and spread peacefully at the trading centres among the West African buyers and North African sellers at the trading centres in Jenne, Timbuktu, Sankore, Awdaghost, Kanem-Borno et cetera. Islam contributed to the economic growth of some West African states since it came to them through trading transaction between the West Africans and North Africans.²⁴

Political Impact

Islam made a lot of impact on the political structure of West African states and this is the main reason why the spread of Islam in some West African states were spear-headed by some rulers and kings. For instance, Mansa Musa of Mali empire, Askia Muhammad Toure of Songhai empire and Umme Jilmi and Idris Aloomo of Kanem-Borno empire. Some of these rulers appointed the Muslim scholars as their secretaries, judge, political advisers and subjects. Several Islamic titles are borrowed and used freely among the political officers and functionaries in some West African states. Such titles include Emir, Alkali, Hakimi, Shehu, Sultan, Emir, Al-Qadi, Hakim, Shaykh and Sultan respectfully.²⁵

Educational Impact

Educational impact is the most notable impact made by the advent of Islam in West African states. Islam introduced the art of reading and writing into West African states which eventually led to the emergence of institutions of higher learning such as colleges and universities in Jenne and Sankore where various Islamic sciences and physical sciences were learnt. It should be rightly mentioned at this juncture that some of the academic proceedings and output of these higher institutions of learning were transported to some European universities to train their students before they produced their own. Arabic was used as a medium of instruction in the class, this made it possible for West African people to keep records of events in their domain. Not only that, it also made Arabic language to become official and mother tongue of some West African states.²⁶

Conclusion

The study explored the advent of Islam in West Africa

in which it examines the origin and contact of Islam in West Africa. It went on to analyse the advent of Islam in some ancient states in West Africa and Islamic reformation and motives behind these reformation. It also highlighted the remarkable impacts of Islam on the West African people. At this juncture, it could be rightly pointed out that Islam spread to West Africa peacefully through trade transaction and mutual human inter-relationship Islam did not spread by the sword as claimed by some historians. Even in some places in the West African states where there were Islamic reformations known as Jihad, it was not primarily instigated against non-Muslims but the Muslims who were mixing Islam with paganism, while those Jihad which were waged against non-Muslims were directed to those who were warring against the spread of Islam in their domain in same way the Christian crusade war were waged against those who were regarded as anti-Christ in the Eleventh century. Despite this, Islam made a lot of remarkable developments to the rapid growth and fast civilization of the West African states.

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