

**MISSIO DEI AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN NIGERIA:
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odeyelizabeth@unical.edu.ng**Abstract**

Missio Dei is a concept in the theology of mission that was formalized in the 20th century by the International Missionary Council in 1952. It was used to reorganize mission understanding from human or church-centred mission to God-centred mission. As a result, the focus of Christian mission was redirected to the Trinitarian nature of the sending God. This paper seeks to explore the concept of *Missio Dei* as basis for religious tolerance in the Nigerian context. It argues that proper understanding and application of the *Missio Dei* can enhance religious tolerance in the face of chains of religious conflicts in Nigeria. It employs historical-theological approach in which historical data combines with theological interpretations to determine results. It uses library studies and internet sources to gather data. The paper shows how *Missio Dei* can reduce religious tension and enhance peaceful coexistence in a pluralist society like Nigeria.

Keywords: *Missio Dei*, Religious Tolerance, Christian Mission and Peaceful Coexistence.

Introduction

Mission has been understood in church history as the work of God towards transforming humanity and creation. Right from the biblical creation story, God was seen as the author of all things, but created human beings and gave them dominion over all the earth. This power of dominion given to humans was abused in the Garden of Eden by Adam and Eve, thus, sin came into the world, begging for God's redemption. Both biblical and church history accounts have shown the progression, shifts and gradual manifestations of the mission of God. For instance, the Bible gives us what theologians called 'the theology of synergy', where God called humans and passed through them to carry out God's mission on earth. An example is the story of Noah, the call of Abraham, the Israelite as a people of God, Prophets, Jesus Christ and all believers as instruments of God's mission on earth.

Since human beings serve as instruments of God's mission, different mission understanding, mission theologies, mission paradigms, missionary institutions, churches and even powerful religious leaders have emerged in church history, driving the mission of God in different contexts. A Missiologist, David Bosch, carried out very comprehensive work on God's mission, focusing on the various paradigm shifts in the theology of mission. His book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, contains the entire sweep of Christian mission with five paradigm shifts, spanning through the entire church history (19). It is one of these paradigms shift in the understanding of Christian mission that is called *Missio Dei*.

Missio Dei is a 20th century shift in the theology of mission from human or Church-centred activity to God-centred mission. In other words, mission understanding shifted from being seen as human or Church activities to being seen as the work of God. From this time, mission was seen not as Church project, but rooted in the Trinitarian nature of God who sent His Son and His Son sent the Holy Spirit. Human beings or the church are only participants or instruments used by God through the Holy Spirit to carry out God's mission on earth. Theologians and Missiologists therefore argue that the understanding of this shift in Christian mission is capable of reducing superiority complex in churches, church leaders or believers in general, bringing all human institutions into humility and religious tolerance as mere participants or instruments or clay in God's hands.

Problem Statement

The problem this paper seeks to resolve here has to do with the religious conflicts in the Nigerian society. Religious crises have lingered in Nigeria with several losses of lives and properties. Recently, the USA government offered to intervene in what they called Christian genocide in Nigeria. This shows the magnitude of the religious conflict from Boko Haram Islamist terrorists killing and burning down properties, to Farmers-Herders crises doing similar havoc and the bandits. Whatever name they call them, all of them are pursuing similar agenda, unaliving innocent people, attacking government facilities and displacing people from their motherland. Religious tolerance is still far from many parts of Nigeria which is why this paper is significant.

Literature Review

Many scholars have described *Missio Dei* as a framework for religious tolerance. How has this understanding trickled into Nigerian religious space to ensure tolerance and peaceful coexistence? This is the concern of this paper, but let's examine what other scholars have done in this subject matter in order to discover the gap this paper would fill. James White published a book in this area titled *Missio Dei: The Sending of God*, which stresses that mission is authored by God who is the sender. The book emphasizes applying the concept into our daily life and church purpose so that God's way not ours will be pursued (45). On his part Peter Pikkert did a historical work on this concept, tracing its history through the mainline churches and the evangelical world. Pikkert addresses some concerns involved in the *Missio Dei* including how it can breed humility among believers in participating in God's mission (7). Alan Hirsch admonishes the believers to go back to this understanding of mission as the work of God. In his book, *The Forgotten Ways*, the church is to go back to the *Missio Dei*, and focus on harnessing God's power for future progress (81). Andy Johnson brings this concept into the realm of holiness. In his book, *Holiness and the Missio Dei*, he argues that christian holiness comes from participating in God's mission and not from individual inward piety. For him, God justifies those who participate in God's purpose asserting that participation in the *Missio Dei* transforms us into the *Imago Dei* (image of God) which guarantees our holiness (102). Whereas Jonas Kurlberg and Peter situate the *Missio Dei* in the realm of digital world and argue that even in the digital age, everything we do must derive its power, wisdom and validity from God who is in mission in the world, Lesslie Newbigin, an English theologian who popularized the concept of the *Missio Dei* in England brings the concept into the realm of a pluralist society. He argues that even as Europe is becoming secular and religion has been privatized, no one should privatize

the gospel. God should still be the source of all things including our power, wisdom, decisions and actions (62). Three African scholars brought the *Missio Dei* into an African context. Harvey Kwiyani, a Malawian theologian, situates the concept under human-hood or human suffering in Africa, which he called *umunthu*, a Malawian language meaning humanity or person-hood. He says that *Missio Dei* when appropriated into African context, helps us to see God as the one in mission, not Europeans, Africans should look up to God who can transform us (61). Also, Fubara-Manuel and Bassey Obio are both Nigerian theologians who analyzed the concept of *Missio Dei* in the Nigerian context. While Fubara-Manuel situates it in the realm of churches' knowing their place in God's mission in Nigeria, Obio brings it into religious tolerance in Nigeria. In his article for World Council of Churches, Obio draws the attention of the world ecumenical body to the chronic religious tension in Nigeria and how propagating the understanding of the *Missio Dei* might ameliorate the situation (83).

The Gap

From the foregoing, there is agreement among scholars that *Missio Dei* is theologically and missiologically authentic, such that mission authority must be placed in God, and all humans, churches, world institutions should derive their sources of power, wisdom and actions from God. This can breed absolute dependence on God, humility in christian witness and tolerance in a pluralist society. However, the gap in this literature review is that there is no concrete studies on how *Missio Dei* has been applied in a particular situation or context and the outcome observed over time. This is where this paper contributes to the advancement of knowledge in this subject matter.

The Aim

The aim of this paper is therefore to explore, in historical perspective, how Churches and religious groups in Nigeria have understood and applied this *Missio Dei* concept for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. While my first article in this area was drawing the attention of the World Council of Churches to religious crises in Nigeria and how its *Missio Dei* concept can fit in here, this paper reveals concrete historical facts about the reception, understanding and application of this concept for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification: Understanding the Theological Concept of the *Missio Dei*

This concept was coined in the 20th century which makes it relatively new in the history of the theology of mission. From the 20th century, the concept began to appear in missiological literature. Therefore, this paper unpacks its meaning in stages as seen across literature, from the etymological meaning to literal, theo-centric, biblical, teleological and praxis meanings.

Etymological Meaning

Etymologically, James White explains that the origin of this concept comes from Latin language. While the idea of mission of God was already in existence, the first time this concept was coined, it was done so in Latin language called *Missio Dei*, meaning 'Mission of God' and can also mean 'Sending of God' (21). This carries the idea that it is God who owns the mission and sends His Son, the Holy Spirit and all believers.

Literal Meaning

Literally, *Missio Dei* refers to God the Father sending His Son to die and calling all humans into repentance and redemption, then the Son sent the Holy Spirit to continue the redemption work through all believers. The mandate is to transform the world to conform to the *imago Dei* (image of God). This is what Guerlinz Affriany explains as the literal or direct meaning of the *Missio Dei*. In his book, *Missio Dei: The Forgotten Heart of the Gospel*, he argues that mission originates from the heart of God, who is the author and sender in Christian mission (14).

Theocentric Meaning

In terms of the theo-centric meaning, *Missio Dei* refers to a shift in knowledge about Christian mission from human efforts to divine actions. When mission is seen as divine action or what Karl Barth in John Flett calls *actio Dei* (action of God), then this is the theo-centric meaning of the concept (Flett 16).

Biblical Meaning

Biblically speaking, *Missio Dei* refers to the mandate of God from creation mandate to restoration of all things. Bassey Obio, in his previous article, developed a section on biblical foundation of the *Missio Dei*, where he discovered that this concept actually resonates in all pages of the Bible; from creation to restoration mandate in the Bible are God's action in mission (85). God in action in all human history and culture is what informs the biblical meaning of this term.

Teleological Meaning

In terms of the teleological meaning, Fubara-Manuel defines *Missio Dei* as the greater purpose of God upon which all mission activities derive their purpose and focus (15). In his book, *In the Missio Dei*, he shows how mission is purposefully-driven or driven by purpose which emanates from the greater purpose. The Church, religious groups and even secular institutions must draw their purpose from the 'greater purpose'.

Praxis Meaning

In terms of praxis or practical usage of the term *Missio Dei*, Harold Fey describes it as divine action through the missional church, inter-faith dialogue, community development and personal discipleship (27). In the book he edited titled *A History of the Ecumenical Movement Vol.2*, it is explained that mission is the work of God and covers all spheres of human activities where the church and other human institutions must participate in transforming the world in practical term.

From the different definitional points above, the meaning of the concept of *Missio Dei* can be subsumed into four areas of understanding as follows:

- a) God as the originator of mission - This resonates in the theo-centric understanding where every mission activity originates from God. God must remain the source of power, wisdom, knowledge, inspiration and purpose in mission.
- b) Trinitarian Nature of Mission - Father sent the Son and the Son sent the Holy Spirit, who works through believers and the world institutions to transform the world.

- c) Church as Participant in God's Mission - The churches must see themselves as only participating in what God is doing in the world. As such, they must move from superiority complex to humble dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming the world.
- d) Contextualization - Mission work must respect local context, move away from imperial or colonial expansionism. Allow the local context to receive the gospel in their categories, culture and languages. God knows the whole world, and no culture is irrelevant to God. He is not against any culture, but He is transforming cultures through the *Missio Dei*.

Historical Development of the *Missio Dei* in Christian Mission and Religious Tolerance

Tracing the history of the origins and development of this concept is an important part of this paper. As earlier mentioned, the idea of mission of God was already in existence, but mission practitioners, churches and some ecclesiastical leaders had relegated this idea to the background in the course of their missionary enterprises. They rather created an ecclesio-centric view of mission where the Church or missionary societies were seen as originators and authors of mission. Mission enterprises hitherto became like worldly institutions or business companies. It was Schwanz and Joseph who pointed out that the impact of the World Wars led to the killing of many missionaries and their expulsion especially from China in large number that influenced the change of idea of mission from human activities to God-centred activities (10).

The historical precursor to the coinage of the word *Missio Dei* actually started in 1932 with Karl Barth. He lived between 1886-1968 and was an influential Swiss Reformed theologian. Barth was actually a theologian that revolutionized theology by rejecting 19th century liberal theology and favoring theology of the Word or dialectical theology following the World War 1. He is known for also highlighting the radical difference between God and humanity, playing down on White or European supremacy from the experience of the War. This influenced the paper he presented in 1932 at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference where he envisioned a mission as an *actio Dei* (activity of God). This conference which held in Berlin, Germany is always considered a pivotal moment in the 20th century theology, making the origin of the *Missio Dei* paradigm. Barth shifted the focus of mission from a human activity to an act of God (Flett 67).

In another development, Harvey Kwiyanani notes that it was another Karl, called Karl Hartenstein, who later moved the understanding from *actio Dei* (activity of God) to *Missio Dei* (mission of God) in 1934. Karl Hartenstein lived between 1894-1952. He was a German theologian of the Evangelical Church in Germany. He was actually the first to coin and use the term *Missio Dei*. He attended the International Missionary Conference held in 1952 where the idea about mission being an act of God formed the core of the conference conversation. But the term was never mentioned or used at the conference. After the conference, he was one of those who compiled the conference report where he had the opportunity to use the term *Missio Dei* as the main outcome of the theology of mission deliberations at the conference (56). Thus, the two Karls (Karl Barth and Karl Hartenstein) were the foundational figures in the historical origin of the term *Missio Dei*.

From the foregoing historical developments, we can divide the origin of the term *Missio Dei* into five stages for easy understanding:

- a) Ancient/Medieval Roots - As stated earlier that the idea existed before its coinage, it was Augustine of Hippo of the 5th century and Thomas Aquinas of the medieval church history era that first described mission as 'Trinity's internal action', Father sending the Son and the Holy Spirit. This was already conveying the idea of

mission as God's activity.

- b) Early 20th Century Context - This was Karl Barth's stage where he presented a paper at the Brandenburg Conference in Berlin in 1932 describing mission as an *actio Dei*.
- c) Coinage Stage - This stage happened in 1934 when Karl Hartenstein presented a paper to differentiate between *Missio Ecclesiae* and *Missio Dei*. His aim was to show the clear difference between mission of the church and mission of God, he was presented with opportunity to first coin the term *Missio Dei* which he used to compare with *Missio Ecclesiae*.
- d) Willingen Conference of IMC - This stage occurred in 1952 when the International Missionary Council (IMC) organized a conference at Willingen, Germany where the decline in Western Christianity and the expulsion of European Missionaries from China were discussed. Karl Hartenstein was one of the key participants and discussants at the conference. This gave him opportunity to influence the conversation towards seeing mission as God's activity. Since this was an ecumenical gathering, it became a bigger forum for the reception of this new idea about the theology of mission.
- e) Post Willingen Expansion Stage - This stage happened after the conference. The term *Missio Dei* was fully captured in the conference report as the new theology of mission. The report was disseminated to all parts of the world, to different church denominations whose leaders attended the conference. It later became popular theme in Lutheran, Protestant, Catholic and Evangelical theologies

Missio Dei as Framework for Religious Tolerance in Nigeria

A pluralist society is where multiple distinct groups coexist. It is a society where people of different culture, religion, political interest and ethnicity share common resources in a nationhood. It comes in different dimensions such as:

- a) Political Pluralism - This is a society with several political parties or interest groups competing to influence government decisions in their favour.
- b) Cultural or Ethnic Pluralism - This speaks of a country with numerous languages, social identities, cultural practices and multiple belief systems coexisting together.
- c) Religious Pluralism - This is a country with diverse religious beliefs and practices.

Characteristics of God-centred Mission

It was Lesslie Newbigin, an English theologian, who first applied the concept of the *Missio Dei* in a pluralist society. According to him, a society that constitutes diverse community should place God at the centre in order not to entertain sectarian dominance or dominance of one interest over the other. He explains that understanding and application of the *Missio Dei* guarantees tolerance by various component units. Although the United States and Nigeria are usually seen as countries with complex political and social diversity, Newbigin applied the *Missio Dei* within the Western context. He identifies the secular and plural nature of the Western world, and challenges the privatization of the gospel. According to him, all things proceed from God and that the gospel is not merely private opinion, but truth that applies to all of life (102).

This was an eye-opener to many theologians in areas of complex diversities. Any attempt to fail to place God at the centre of affairs can lead to intolerance and conflicts. This is the story of Nigeria where the multi-religious groups existing in Nigeria have ignited unending crises.

Why Man-centred Mission Fuels Intolerance in Nigeria

It is an established fact that three major religions exist in Nigeria such as Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The exact percentage is what has not been static. According to Haldun Canci, there is no exact percentage of religious representation in Nigeria. He quoted Pew Research Centre as putting the data at 36% Christianity, 48% for Islam and 16% others. He also mentioned data from Demographic and Health Survey which has 53% for Christianity, 45% for Islam and 2% for others while Afrobarometer puts it at 56% for Christianity, 43% for Islam and 1% for others (23). However, for the avoidance of doubt regarding the data, it is safer to describe the standing of the various religious groups based on the geopolitical zones of the country. In this sense, the North East and North West zones are predominantly Muslims while the South East and South-South are predominantly Christians. It is the Middle Belt and South West that have a mix.

Nigerians, and indeed Africans, are religious people. They practice their religion with passion. In-fact, it was Mbiti who explained that Africans are religious people and that religion permeates all facets of African life (15). For this reason, Nigeria has experienced religious fanaticism, where some extremists plunge the country into religious conflicts. Canci analyzed them in four stages as follows:

- a) Boko Haram Insurgency - This is an Islamist terrorist group that has existed in Nigeria since 2009 till date. The group is against Western education and civilization. They want Sharia law to be enshrined everywhere in Nigeria. The group has committed terrible havoc, burning houses, killing civilians and soldiers and bombing government facilities in a terrible way. Their main focus is to establish Islamic State in Nigeria.
- b) Kaduna Sharia Riot - This occurred in the year 2000 when Sharia law was introduced and enforced in Kaduna State. It sparked religious conflict where over 3,000 people were killed.
- c) Jos Crises - This is one of the most destructive religious conflicts in Nigeria since 2001. It is still happening till date where over 19,000 people have been killed and many people displaced, properties destroyed.
- d) Farmers-Herders Clashes - This is a religious conflict disguised as Farmers and Herders clashes. It is calculated attempt by the Islamist terrorists to wipe out communities and grab their territories. This is because it has been proven that it is not all the Herders that attack farmers, but only those funded by the Islamist terrorist group to execute their Islamic agenda. Many people have been killed, communities wiped out and many people displaced by this clashes. It is still happening till date in Benue, Kaduna and Plateau States.

How *Missio Dei* Encourages Tolerance

It was Kwiyani who first popularized this concept in Africa. In his book *Missio Dei: An African Appropriation*, he identifies two ways to receive this concept into the African context such as a) must connect to the African theology. This means that the concept must be made to reflect the existential realities of the African people like poverty, suffering, conflicts, political instability, spiritual forces controlling people's fortunes, and so on. b) Must be received within the premise that mission is God's mission and not the church's. This means that Africans must be made to stop looking up to the Churches, but look up to God who is the author of mission. African mission should move from anthropocentric view to *Missio Dei*. This reflects the African spiritual worldview where people will not see Missionaries but seeing God (61).

In this sense, Kwiyani uses the Malawian concept of *umunthu* (person-hood or humanity) to receive

and apply the *Missio Dei* into the Malawian context in Africa. His approach was focusing on the first way in which African theology is brought into consideration. He was looking at the suffering, pains and tragedies the people of Africa are going through which dehumanizes them in most cases. For him, when *Missio Dei* is understood as the God who is in mission to set the captives free and transform us, is capable of proffering solution to the plight of Africans (68).

This paper therefore places emphasis on the second way to receive the *Missio Dei* in African context which is seeing God and not Missionaries or the church. The paper also agrees with Lesslie Newbigin's assertion that instead of privatizing the gospel, we should popularize the gospel as applicable to all of life (24).

Observation and studies have shown that there is actually reception and application of the *Missio Dei* understanding of mission in Nigeria since after the 1952 Willingen Conference where the concept began to receive popularity. There has been a shift from *Missio Ecclesiae* (Church-centric mission) to a more holistic, indigenous and trinitarian emphasis in Nigerian Christian mission which now emphasizes social transformation along spiritual evangelism.

From all observations and studies, the reception will first be presented in historical stages, then the application in Nigeria follows suit. In terms of the reception of the *Missio Dei*, we can see four stages as follows:

- a) Early Phase - This is the formal first stage of Christian mission in Nigeria. It started in the 19th century during the European missionary movements in church history. It occurred between 1841 and 1891 featuring the work of the freed slaves from Sierra Leone in 1839 and the European missionary movements from 1841. Ayodeji Abodunde identifies particular missionary groups from Europe that brought Christian mission to Nigeria such as Methodist in 1842, Anglican Communion in 1845, Presbyterian mission in 1846, Baptist church in 1850 and Roman Catholic in 1852. This was the first stage Christian mission idea came into Nigeria which is called era of initial Christian mission (17). Emeka C. Ekeke also confirms in his work on Church History differentiating between the Aladura and the Pentecostal movements in Nigeria. He made reference to this first stage in the 19th century calling it historic or missionary church era (252). At this stage the understanding of the *Missio Dei* was reduced to *Missio Ecclesiae*. The European Missionaries and their churches were seen as the author and centre of Christian mission.
- b) Post 1952 Shift in Paradigm - Following the 1952 Willingen Conference which highlighted the *Missio Dei* globally, from the mid-1950s, Nigerian missiology began to shift towards understanding that mission originates from the Triune God and not Western missionary societies. From this time, indigenous church leaders in Nigeria began to champion missionary works like the rise of Redeemed Christian Church of God, Olumba Olumba Obu and others, even in mainline churches, the indigenous church leaders like Most Rev. Dr. James Ukaegbu of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria who became the first indigenous General Assembly Moderator, took over and began to run mission work independent of the European Missionaries.
- c) Indigenous Take-over Phase - This was the 20th century Christian mission in Nigeria where the indigenous leaders massively took over the mission affairs flowing from a shift in mission understanding from *Missio Ecclesiae* to *Missio Dei*. According to Francis Edet, the freed Slave from Sierra Leone by name Ajayi Crowder returned to Nigeria at this time and became the first indigenous Bishop in Nigeria. This was as a result of shift in the understanding of the Christian mission (15).
- d) Pentecostal Explosion Phase - The rise and dominance of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements in

Nigeria especially in the late 20th century and 21st century marked another stage in the reception of the *Missio Dei* in Nigeria. These movements were centred on the power of the Holy Spirit in mission which is part of the idea of the *Missio Dei*. In her book, *African Independent Church Movements*, Elizabeth Odey acknowledges the explosion of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements in Nigeria such that their growth impact has affected the entire society and even the mainline churches who are also 'Pentecostalizing' or experiencing charismatic renewals (165). This has even made Africa the new centre of global Christianity.

How Christian Mission Promotes *Missio Dei* in Nigeria

In terms of the clear points of promoting the *Missio Dei* in Nigeria, six points of its application have been identified as follows:

a) Ecumenism and Mission - The way the term "ecumenism" is used today speaks of church unity or household nature of the church universal. Benebo Fubara-Manuel records that the English word "ecumenism" came from Greek word "*Oikoumene*" which means "the whole inhabited universe" (9). In this sense, he explains that ecumenism has to do with household management in such a way that all things within the household hold together. When this is applied to the management of the entire Christendom, it could then be called ecumenical partnership in Christian mission. Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, first General Secretary of World Council of Churches (1938-1966), provides seven (7) connotations/meanings of the term ecumenism in historical perspective as follows:

- (i) Ecumenism pertains to the whole inhabited earth
- (ii) It represents the whole of the Roman Empire as shown in the Bible
- (iii) It pictures the whole of the church
- (iv) It represents that which has universal ecclesiastical validity
- (v) It pertains to the whole world- wide missionary outreach of the church
- (vi) It has to do with unity of two or more churches
- (vii) It refers to quality or attitude for Christian unity (15).

A Critical look at the above explanation and usage of the term ecumenism, one sees clearly that the central meaning is the pursuit of church unity or ecumenical partnership in Christian mission. While the explanation of Fubara-Manuel moves from understanding of household unity to Christian unity in mission, that of Visser 't Hooft just looks at unity in several perspectives from limited to general connotations of the term. This suggests that ecumenism could be used in both limited and general sense of ecumenical partnership. This is why we have Local, National, Regional, Sub-regional and Global ecumenical partnership in Christian mission. So when two or more local churches within a particular country pursue unity, it is national ecumenism, when churches within a sub-region like West Africa pursue unity, it is sub-regional ecumenism. When churches within a region like Africa pursue unity, it is regional ecumenism and when churches all over the world seek unity, it becomes global ecumenism.

Collins Dictionary presents its phonetics as (*ɪkjuːmenɪzəm*) and defines ecumenical partnership as the belief that the different Christian Churches should be as united as possible and can also be used to refer to actions based on this belief. On its part, *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains ecumenical partnership in Christian mission, as movement or tendency toward worldwide Christian unity or cooperation in missions. The term, of recent origin, emphasizes what is viewed as the universality of the Christian faith and unity among churches. The ecumenical movement seeks to recover the apostolic sense of the early church for unity in diversity, and it

confronts the frustrations, difficulties, and ironies of the modern pluralistic world. It is a lively reassessment of the historical sources and destiny of what followers perceive to be the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ (115).

Historically speaking, it was the global ecumenical body called International Missionary Council (IMC) that developed this *Missio Dei* term in 1952. This actually influenced ecumenism all over the world. In Nigeria, ecumenism started in 1929 with the formation of Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN). This was the first ecumenical movement in Nigeria involving the mainline churches, of course document about the *Missio Dei* was in circulation. As different religious movements developed in Nigeria, they also formed ecumenical movements also such as Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Evangelical Churches Winning All (ECWA), etc. By 1979, all these ecumenical bodies came together and formed the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). This is an umbrella body of ecumenical movements in Nigeria involving CCN, PFN, ECWA, AICs and Catholic Secretariat as five families of CAN in Nigeria. This ecumenical bodies constitute a point of the application of the *Missio Dei* in Nigeria.

b) Pentecostal *Missio Spiritus* - This point is where the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are emphasizing the power of the Holy Spirit in Christian mission in Nigeria. They have moved the understanding of Christian mission in Nigeria from *Missio Ecclesiae* to *Missio Spiritus*. This is closest to the *Missio Dei* because the Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity. The mainline churches are also experiencing renewals and moves from church-centric mission to *Missio Spiritus*.

c) Holistic Mission - This is the point at which churches in Nigeria are seeing mission not only as Church-centred affair but emphasizing also social transformation, prosperity gospel, healing/deliverance, education, health and poverty alleviation programmes. This was as a result of the application of the understanding of the *Missio Dei*.

d) Contextualization - The understanding of this concept of mission in Nigeria has led to local-context-driven mission where churches are bringing the reign of God to all spheres of life reaching indigenous people in their languages, culture, categories and contexts.

e) Theological Reconfiguration - This is the point where Nigerian Theologians and Missiologists applied the understanding of the *Missio Dei* in their theological analysis. This understanding has shaped their development of mission theology in Nigeria. Some Nigerian theologians and scholars have contributed to the discourse on *Missio Dei*, often contextualizing it within the African experiences of community, politics, religious conflicts and holistic witness. They include Benebo Fubara-Manuel whose work *In the Missio Dei* draws attention to the greater purpose of God in mission to salvage His people including Africans, Babatunde Adedibu who is known for his work on the mission of God exploring African perspectives and the role of the Church in society, Afeosemime Adogame a leading scholar in African Christianity, diaspora and global religious dynamics touching upon how *Missio Dei* is expressed through the movements and expansion of African churches, Ferdinand Nwaigbo a Catholic theologian at the Catholic Institute of West Africa whose work frames the churches' role within the *Missio Dei* and the divine plan for salvation, Sunday Agang an academic who has contributed to African public theology focusing on applying *Missio Dei* to social issues like poverty alleviation, E.E. Uzukwu known for his work on ecclesiology which explores a contextually aware model of mission and Bassey Obio a Presbyterian/Reformed theologian who situated the *Missio Dei* in the context of Religious Tolerance in Nigeria.

f) Inter-faith Dialogue - This is another area where the concept of the *Missio Dei* has been applied in Nigeria. Due to the lingering religious conflicts in Nigeria, many fora have been organized for interfaith dialogue which involves the understanding that God is the author of mission and we are just participants. In Nigeria, there are different levels of interfaith dialogues such as State-led, community-driven, Civil Society-driven and Church-driven dialogues. In 1989, President Babangida initiated a State-led interfaith dialogue in Nigeria involving Christians, Muslims and Traditionalists to resolve religious conflicts. In 1999, the government established the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) to pursue interfaith dialogue and foster mutual understanding. Civil Societies and ecumenical bodies are funded to organize regular interfaith dialogues in Nigeria. There are several notions of mission of God or mission belongs to God in their dialogue documents which suggests clear application of the *Missio Dei* in Nigeria (Momoh 18).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the concept of *Missio Dei* as basis for Christian mission and religious tolerance in Nigeria. The origins of the concept of *Missio Dei* placed from the early and medieval period in Church history with Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas at this early stage, then to the papers presented in 1930s by Karl Barth and Karl Hartenstein introducing the term up to the 1952 Willingen Conference organized by the IMC where the concept began to gain popularity in the Christian mission theology. *Missio Dei* properly suits a pluralist society like Nigeria. The paper has also placed the concept in Nigerian context of religious crises and highlighted the implications for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Contribution to Knowledge/Scholarship

This work has expanded knowledge in the field of ecclesiology and christian mission. It has moved the authority of mission from *Missio Ecclesia* (Mission of the Church) to *Missio Dei* (Mission of God) and situates it under the religious crises of Nigeria. Particularly, it has made contribution in the area of religious tolerance in Nigeria. All the literature reviewed under this subject matter have never situated the concept of *Missio Dei* under religious tolerance. This is the gap discovered from literature review. This work is the first to bring the understanding of the *Missio Dei* into the realm of religious tolerance especially in a religiously plural society like Nigeria. Proper dissemination of this concept can engender religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. This concept sees the Christian mission from Cosmo-centric view, where God is in charge of the whole affairs of the earth. It moves believers from the idea of Christo-centric or Allah-centric views of life into the Cosmo-centric view. This promotes religious tolerance.

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