

The Historic Arrival of Christianity in Doko District.

By

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Beginning of the Gospel in Doko

The first missionaries that attempted to bring Christianity to Doko were from Bassa tribe in Lokoja in the present Kogi State of Nigeria. The first man identified among the missionaries from Lokoja was Nda-Akerele. His stay at Doko was very brief. Another man that stayed for a longer period was Nda-Jeremiah. In the context of lack of modern transportation at that time, the missionaries usually travel on foot from Lokoja through Kpatagban to Doko. The journey from Lokoja to Doko took them about five days. They always carry a bent stick to wade off wild animals on their way to Doko. Though there is no known record of the precise date of these missionaries' arrival in Doko, it could be as early as 1905, a year that several areas in the middle belt of Nigeria witness arrival of missionaries.

The first mission post was established at Edoko. Wherever a missionary arrived in Edoko in Doko town he was taken to the village head for introduction and courtesy call. There were only a few converts at this initial contacts with the missionaries. Then the population of the converts increased rapidly during the arrival of teacher called Daniel Tijiku from Yagba county in the present day Kwara State.

The mission overseer of evangelization of Doko District, Rev. T. E. Alvarez, was stationed in Bida town. Consequently, Rev. Alvarez sent missionaries to Doko to spread the gospel. He was popularly known as "Ndatinti". Up till today, Christians in Doko are called "EgiNdatinti" meaning the children of Rev. Alvarez.

Among the early converts was Joshua Etsu Kolo. He was the first leader of the converts. It was in Joshua Kolo's house that the Christians celebrated their Christmas every year. His younger brother called Shaba Kolo Sansaniko also accepted the Christian faith. They were followed by Baba Daniel Lazhi Sokomba as the third convert. Baba Daniel became the leader of the church in place of the two brothers i.e. the Kolos, because he was the one who could read and write in Nupe. He lived for many years. His immense contributions to the growth of Christianity in Doko and its environs cannot be overemphasized.

The gospel of Jesus Christ as the light of the world that was embraced by the local people has drastic effects on the lives of the people in Doko District in several ways including spiritual, economic, educational, health and agriculture development.

Spiritual Impact.

Often, the adherents of traditional religion renounced it and accepted Christ. They started with the building of a small church house by the side of the Doko hill, but with time two more consecutive Churches were constructed. The Church was named St. Peter's Church, Doko. Today Doko Christians worship in the third church building, which is now the Cathedral of the Dioceses. The first church was built in 1945. As the Christian population continued to increase, there was a need for a bigger church that could take all the converts and their families. Therefore, another church was proposed and Rt. Rev. Titus Ogboyomi (rtd) laid the foundation in 1978.

On 28th December 2005 the devil struck and fire raised St. Peter's church building to ashes. The foundation of the new church was laid by Rt. Rev. Jonah G. Kolo on 6th May, 2006. Professor Jerry Gana and his committee were mandated to build another befitting church for St. Peter's congregation. Today, we are under the roof of the new church that now serves as the Cathedral Church of Doko Diocese.

When the foundation of the present Church was laid, little did we know that God had approved it for a Cathedral status. Here we are under the roof, more solid, spacious, magnificent and more glorious than the former. The Devil is a liar!

(Insert picture of the church here)

“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty. And in this place, I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty.” (Hag. 2:9)

We thank and appreciate the chairman and the committee members. Our thanks also go to those who have generously donated cash and kind for the progress of work done so far. It is my hope and prayer that the Lord who has started this good work in you will bless and replenish you all according to his riches in glory, Amen.

This Church has a rich and interesting history. It has been threatened and bedevilled right from the beginning with problems and difficulties from within and outside. Here it is today still standing and growing stronger, because the Lord of the church is mighty and victorious in keeping His promise.”..... I will build my church, and the gates of hives (hell) will not overcome it”. (Matt. 16:18).

The Crusade of 1953

The Crusade in Doko in 1953 was aimed at awakening the Christians, particularly in Doko town and its surrounding villages. People from far places came to witness this crusade, which lasted for seven days. People gathered together in the church premises everyday to listen to the Word of God being preached. The leader of this gathering was a white man. There were some days set aside when after meeting together in the Church, they divided the people into six groups of twenty-people, with a leader to facilitate the study of the word

of God. During the crusade, the word of God was fruitful because a great number were added to the faithful. The Christians at this time continue to grow stronger and were increasing day by day as in the case of the early Church. (Acts. 2:47)

In post-independence Nigeria Doko District was a fertile land for the gospel. Hence, another crusade in 1966 was conducted for seven days. The lead speaker was the God's anointed Evangelist Philip Zhitsu from Patigi in Edu Local Government Area of Kwara State. The theme of the crusade was titled "Rayi woro ya eza ndondo" meaning "New Life for all". After the morning and evening sessions, in the evenings the evangelists visited different compounds to preach the Good News. The crusade achieved unprecedented success. Tens of Thousands accepted Christ and converted to Christianity. The new converts were baptized by the then vicar, the late Rev. Canon J. N. Angulu, of blessed memory.

During the 1970s, from their institutions of learning the students of Doko origin returned for long vocation and organized themselves into small groups for evangelism. On Sundays, the students visit the churches in Doko District in order to strengthen the members of each church in spiritual growth and faith. The Church in Doko town and the surrounding churches were happy about this spiritual awakening the students facilitated. I am glad to say that we were privileged to be participants in the outreaches. By 1978 with the power the Holy Spirit I became the leader of one of the students' groups. But then, being a convert or Christian has been a daunting task in Doko District.

The Issue of Domestic Slavery

The issue of domestic slavery known in Nupe language as "Tsofa" and the indiscriminate conscription into forced labour camps "Keremi" by the then Government requires a clear explanation as they relate to the arrival of Christianity in Doko District. Suffice it to say that the light of Christ brought freedom to our people.

Under "Tsofa" as a system a person who wanted to marry or do other things like pay tax, or borrow money, becomes indebted to the person who lent money. The debtor then retires to the farm of the creditor and continue to work for the creditor until such a time he was able to complete payment of his debt. That meant that the creditor got back his money and at the same time received free labour from his debtors. It was a form of domestic slavery. The arrival of the gospel began to change the system such that the debtor will not go to the farm of the creditor but pay only the debt.

Conscription into Forced Labour Camps (Keremi)

As was the practice by the colonial government, the conscription for forced labour was rife in the period of the construction of railway lines from Baro to Minna and from Zungeru to Minna. Also in progress was the mining in Jos, Plateau State. These labour camps provided an opportunity for the aristocratic class to get rid of those they did not want to have in the

society. The so called tax evaders, stubborn people and other related offenders were usually drafted to such camps to serve as a kind of punishment. But this system was grossly abused. The overlords used it as a privilege to victimize anybody who was thought to have constituted themselves into an affront to their wills.

It was in this forced slavery for free labour period that Baba Daniel Lazhi Sokomba, one of the early converts and the Christian leader in Doko became an activist against inhumanity of man-to-man and made efforts that it must be stopped. It was forcing a large number of people to migrate from Doko to places where they would be out of the reach of their overlords. An example was a village called Sokingi in the present Kwara state which was established by emigrants from Doko. Baba Daniel Sokomba in trying to mobilize some aggrieved people to fight these social evils, found himself in head on against the local politics of Doko. He raised a formidable team and decided to take the matter to the white District Officer at Bida. They could not speak the language of the white man, English or Hausa. They were helped by a woman relation who volunteered to accompany them to the District Officer's home to be the interpreter. They made good use of this opportunity and told him what was happening in Doko. The D. O. promised them that something would be done. When Baba Daniel and his group returned to Doko they were hated by the ruling class who called them many unpleasant names. One day when everybody including Baba Daniel thought that the whole matter had been forgotten, news suddenly came that the District Officer was going to visit Gaba village. He came, he saw and he conquered. At Gaba the D. O. made the historic declaration that domestic economic slavery known as "Tsofa" in all its ramifications was abolished and anybody who was being held for such reasons was released. The good news is that both the Christians and the non-Christians benefited from this abolition of the inhuman practice. My grandmother told us that she was a beneficiary of the abolition. Thanks to the light of Christ that shined through these courageous and gallant pioneers of the Christian faith in Doko. But the struggle was not limited to stopping domestic slavery. The Christians desired formal education and began the enlightenment struggle.

EDUCATION

In 1943, a native authority school was opened at Doko. The method of enrolment was through conscription. Every household head had to provide a child, a boy or a girl. The teaching staff were one headmaster, Mallam Saidu Bida and another person who was the Arabic teacher. There was no provision for the teaching of Christian religious Studies although there was a number of Christian pupils in the school. The parents of these Christian children were not happy with this development. They were afraid that their children would be converted to Islam. A formal complaint was made to the authorities, but the Christian parents were threatened with arrest and banishment. The situation became aggravated when the parents of these pupils observed that their children were given wooden

slate (Elo), with Arabic written on them to bring home. This was the last stroke that broke the camel's back. The five aggrieved Christian parents then were, namely:

Baba Daniel Sokomba, who was the leader of the Christian community in Doko, Mr. Elijah Yisa Dzukomisun, Mr. Paul Kolo Takogi, Mr. Abel Jiya Kpacinifu, and Mr. Nathaniel Gana, who was Baba Daniel Sokomba's younger brother. Collectively, they marched to the village head (Etsu Dazhi Abu) and protested. They were told to see the headmaster. The headmaster told them that there was nothing they could do as they were working according to instruction. The protesting people, who were not satisfied with what they were told, decided to go to Bida to lay their complaints to the highest missionary authorities. They went to Rev. Daniel Sheshi who took them to Rev. Mac and Rev. Nicle, and together they went to the then District Officer in charge of Bida District. The D. O. a white man saw the genuineness of their grievances and therefore directed the then Etsu Nupe (Mallam Muhammed Ndayako) to look carefully into the possibility of giving permission to the Christian community to build their own school.

The Emir obliged the District Officer's request. He therefore authorized the Christians to establish their own school. He also instructed that the Christians who wanted to withdraw their children from the Native Authority School should be allowed to do so.

On 27th March, 1944 a teacher, one Mr. Nathaniel N. Jiya Kuchi was sent by the missionary authority to open St. Peter's C.M.S Primary School, Doko. Consequently, all the Christian children in Native Authority School were withdrawn and they became the foundation pupils of St. Peter's C. M.S Primary School Doko. Among the children released were late Elijah Gana, late, Silas Jiya, Mallam Ndagi Yisa. When, however in 1973 all the schools including St. Peter's C. M. S Primary School Doko were taken over by the Government, people thought that all hopes were lost. As God would have it, however, St. Peter's C.M.S School Doko has metamorphosed into a Nursery/Primary institution today. This School serves other surrounding villages in Doko and is open to both Christians and non Christians.

St Peter's C.M.S Primary School, Doko has produced many eminent men and women in church and society. Such prominent products are with us in this synod today! Some are professors, others are engineers, several are Ph. D degree holders, many are Bishops, administrators, politicians, diplomats, medical personnel, Army Generals, Police Commissioners, and persons of integrity in the country today. A group of people have started mobilizing us to bring us together as the old pupils of the school. We call on all sons, daughters and friends of this school to rise up to the challenge of rebuilding and restoring the lost glory of this cradle of education and missionary activities in Doko land.

THE BEGINNING OF DOKO MARKET

Historically, the location of the only market in Doko District was at Zhima, the headquarters of Zhima/Doko District. Zhima was also the then location of the District Head Office and all the people in authority.

The peasant market women did not feel free to go to that market because of the molestation by men in authority. Consequently, the popular opinion at that time was that a market should be sited in Doko, a town that was bigger than Zhima in all respects. This idea was firmly resented by the Fulani heads who saw the move as an instrument to plug their access to the people and resources. Doko has been an important trade route in the District. Cities and towns such as Agaie, Lapai, Kusogi, Dukpan have all used Doko as a trade route to Patigi and the South.

Another reason was the rejection by the divinities, (idols) on the ground that witches would kill young men if they were seen in the market of Zhima. But then, the representative of the Emir in Doko, called Kpotun Aliyu kicked against having a market in Doko. The fear was that the popularity of Doko with a number of Christian converts was bound to overshadow Zhima, which was the seat of the Fulani authorities.

Evangelist Daniel Tijiku, in co-operation with Doko Christian community disregarded the reasons given by Kpotun and organized the Christians, who with the drums and flutes commenced singing and dancing, and consequently cleared a piece of land given to them for the market. On this piece of land were local traditional religious shrines. The shrine was destroyed, the market was set up and nothing happened to the Christians. The surrounding villages were invited to come to Doko, Daniel's market as it was popularly called, to sell their goods and buy from others. The light of Christ brought economic empowerment to the Christians and the non Christians. This was also a challenge to the traditionalists as their gods could not fight the Christians when they were destroyed. Doko market became first established and is being attended every five days up till today.

THE COLLAPSED OF KUCHI, BRIDGE

In 1965, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the premier of Northern Nigeria, scheduled official visit Doko town. The Christians were told that the purpose of the visit was to Islamize the citizen of Doko. There was feared among Christians that the Premier would destroy St. Peter's Church, Doko. And that anyone who refused to become Muslim was to be seriously persecuted. A number of events began to point to the fact that Christians in Doko were not safe.

First, they were forced by the authorities to abandon the service on a Sunday to undertake the preparation of the shade for the occasion. The fear of what was planned made the Christian go into fervent prayers. While the Premier was already in Bida, on the eve of the visit there was torrential rain that swept away the only bridge linking Doko and Bida at Kuchi. This was God's answer to their prayers. The Premier could not reach Doko but

stopped at Kuchi Tsunyakpa. The church in Doko was not only spared by 1966 crusade thousands of people in Doko accepted Christ. Jesus says “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gate of hades (hell) will not overcome it”. (Matt. 16:18). Today the Church in Doko now serve as the Cathedral of the Diocese.

THE TWENTY-TWO (22) BRUTALIZED VICTIMS OF 1931

As indicated earlier Zhima was the administrative seat of the district. Sometime in 1931, the District Head of Zhima/Doko, on that fateful week paid a three day working visit to Doko. The district head Mallam Mohammed met Mr. Samuel Gana of Doko, who was returning home with a bundle of firewood. Mallam Mohammed ordered his guards to forcefully collect the firewood from the so-called Kafr (unbeliever) that is, Mr. Samuel for his personal use. As Samuel Gana refused and it resulted in an assault on him. The assault led to a big riot in Doko on that day in a free for all fight. The entire entourage of the District Head was defeated and they ran in all directions for safety of their lives. Mr. Samuel Gana victoriously went home with his bundle of firewood. And that ended the visit.

The District Head reported the incidence to the Etsu Nupe in Bida. And by the following morning a group of red uniformed Dogaris were sent to Doko with a list of the following names to be arrested and taken to Bida for interrogation and possible imprisonment. These were;

1. Baba Daniel Lazhi Sokomba (Leader of the Christians)
2. Baba Solomon Gimba (Dazhi Woro)
3. Evangelist Peter Gara (Latiko Evangelist in-charge of Doko Church then)
4. Baba Elijah Yisa (Dzuko Misun)
5. Baba Samuel Gana (The victim)
6. Baba Abraham Gana (Emi Baba Samuel)
7. Baba Peter Makolo (Kpatako)
8. Baba John Taidi (Emi Majingbe Ii)
9. Baba Philip Salla Tsado (Kuchitagi)
10. Baba Jacob Kolo (Difo)
11. Baba Stephen Soje Gana (Defiafu)
12. Baba Nathaniel Wozi Gana (Emi Baba Daniel)
13. Baba Peter Yisa (Edonin)
14. Baba Joshua Yisa (Ndagbodo)
15. Baba Josiah Shiawoya (Dazhi –Woro)
16. Baba Stephen Salawu Gana (Emi Ndashemi)
17. Baba Thomas Taidi
18. Baba Joshua Kolo (Kpakafu)
19. Baba Shaba Salawu (Patibokungi)
20. Baba Paul Kolo Yisa (Anfanifu)

21. Baba Jeremiah Sokomba (Ewongi)
22. Ndakotsu Yisa (Ndaketa Yisa)

The list contained only Christian names although the fight was a mob action that included non-Christians. The list was compiled from Zhima by the people who were not even present at the scene of the event. Evangelist Peter Gara's name was included only because he was the evangelist in-charge of Doko church, not necessarily that he had participated in the fight. They were lined up and driven out of Doko.

Before the party arrested could reach Kuchi, it was dark and they had to pass the night there before proceeding to Bida the following morning. At Kuchi the Christians sought to say their prayers but they were prevented by the red guards. One of the red guards pleaded with the rest that they should be allowed to serve their own God. The guards agreed and the Christian concluded the prayers with the song "Abide with me....."

The following morning they set out for Bida. It was important to note here that these arrested men had not taken any food or water since they were arrested. They were arranged before the then Etsu Nupe, Mallam Saidu. After hearing the case, the Etsu Siadu found no fault in them. But the connivers from Zhima that instigated the arrest felt allowing the arrested men to go back to Doko without punishment, would make the District Head a laughing scorn. This was the reason the men arrested were convicted of tax invading and publicly disgraced and each received twelve strokes of the cane. Rev. T. Alvarez who was in-charge of the Christian communities in Nupe land wrote a letter to the District Officer, who was a white man and informed him about the matter and also demanded that the case be investigated. The investigation showed that they were not tax evaders and the allegation was false. And all the people in the native authority who were connected with the matter from the district headquarters to the scribe were all relieved of their positions.

The twenty-two (22) victimized Christians were taken home by Rev. Alvarez where they remained for four days, eating and nursing their wounds. At the end of their stay the Rev. Alvarez gave each of them a hymn book and ordered them to go back to Doko to sing praises to God to be found worthy to be beaten for the sake of Christ.

These twenty-two (22) men became heroes of faith as we read in Hebrews. 11:1-- When they set their feet at Doko. A crowd gathered to receive them back home. The whole of Doko was in a joyous mood. The courage and the fortitude of these gallant Christian soldiers, the church became firmly established in Doko and brought the menace of Fulani brutality to a standstill in Doko. This is to the benefit of both Christians and non-Christians. Glory to Christ whose light shined through the dark areas of man's life and got freedom from their persecutors.

CONCLUSION

From colonial era the people of Doko embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though the early converts were persecuted and had to struggle on many fronts their acceptance of Christ was not in vain but profitable to all. Jesus-the light of the world has been accomplished from the foundation of the world in Doko. He has brought to us the kingdom of God (Salvation), health care delivery system, deliverance from the dominion of darkness, education, economic empowerment, freedom from labour camps, (Tsofa), Fulani brutality. We have seen, felt, and tasted these by ourselves. We want to see that light of Christ in you reflect to another person. All of us here today have been beneficiaries of the gospel light of Christ. Let this light of Christ in you attract others to Christ. We should not allow this light of Christ to die in our hands. We should let it shine till Jesus comes. We should not allow the labour of our heroes past to down in vain; God will ask us what we have done with it. Are you confused, stumbling in darkness, making a mess of your life? Come to Jesus the light of the world and bring others to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

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(Note: The brief history of Doko is an except from Bishop Charge delivered at the 10th Anniversary of Doko Diocese, Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion)