

Islamic “Da’wah” in Africa: Interview with Prof. Obiora Ike, Nigeria

In recent times Islam has been spreading rapidly in Africa. As in many other countries, the spread of Islam in Nigeria has been supported to a large extent from other countries, through both manpower and finances. On 1st October 2003 Prof. Obiora Ike gave the following interview with the “German Institute for Islamic Studies” concerning the current situation and development in Nigeria.

The Catholic priest **Obiora Ike** wrote his Doctoral dissertation, on Social Ethics, at the University of Bonn. He is director of the „Catholic Institute for Development, Caritas, Justice and Peace“(CIDJAP), and lectures as Professor of African Studies and Social Ethics in Enugu, Nigeria. His work, amongst other things, lies in the areas of development, peace and human rights – he is also closely connected to the “International Society for Human Rights” (ISHR) , Frankfurt - and he is involved in many projects concerning dialogue between Christianity and Islam. He has also published many papers and books dealing with these themes. In 1996 he was awarded the Shalom Peace Prize for his counselling work amongst prisoners. An attempt has already been made on his life. He is convinced that his life was spared by a divine miracle. He comments: “God has protected me, but we live dangerously.”

Is there Islamic “mission” in Nigeria, and if so, what does it look like?

Ifi: “Is there Islamic missionary activity going on in Nigeria? Is Islam actually a missionary religion?”

Prof. Ike: “Islam is, like Christianity, a mis-

sionary religion. Islam came to most countries south of the Sahara in fairly modern times, and broke through in this region notably in the 17th century. It has been forcibly advanced for 700 years. Over the last 20 – 30 years Islam has undergone a renewal, and is advancing in countries like Sudan, Nigeria, South Africa and Somalia, especially since the outbreak of the Iranian (Islamic) Revolution in 1979. Until now, Islam in Nigeria has been represented mainly by the fairly tolerant, moderate and balanced Sunnites. Since the Iranian revolution, and the intensifying of the Palestinian conflict, various smaller fundamentalistic Islamic groups are feeling an urge to defend Islam, and fight against their more moderate fellow believers. It is possible to observe this development and proselytizing in at least 100 smaller groups. They see it as their calling to defend Islam from non-Muslim states, from national decadence, and also Christian evangelism. These struggles appear like a determined effort to establish an Islamic status-quo.

The original African religions are non-missionary religions, and are more a way of perceiving the world, and a way of making one’s way through life. Countries like Libya, Saudi-Arabia, Pakistan and Iran send money to Africa, to entice African governments towards Islam. Christians feel disadvantaged, because they do not receive financial support for mission activities, but only for humanitarian aid-projects, apart from the Pentecostal movement, and the Church of Africa. With Islam there is an outreach movement, controlled and steered from abroad. As a reaction against increasing globalisation it offers a feeling of belonging, a home and protection. There are, however, in the cause of defending Islam, killings going on.”

The call for the introduction of Shariah

Ifi: “What role does the call for the introduction of Shariah in Nigeria play?”

Prof. Ike: “ Shariah [Islamic rules for living, based on the Koran] has existed in Nigeria ever since Islam has been there, but as a private matter, in personal affairs only. Now, however, in 12 out of 36 of the Nigerian administrative regions, Shariah has been introduced as the basis for law and order – against the national constitution, against tolerance, pluralism and religious freedom, and even against internationally agreed United Nations conventions. In these 12 regions all of the courts are Shariah courts. Even conflicts between Muslims and Christians are dealt with in these courts, which means that even Christians have to submit to Shariah law. New forms of violence have emerged as a result of this development, with a death-toll of about 10,000 over the past 5 years. In addition to this, there have been floods of refugees fleeing from the northern regions, as well as extensive damage to houses and property. From the Muslim side all things from the west are rejected, as one could observe through the violent protests which occurred as a result of the planned “Miss World” contest. The Americans led wars in Afganistan and Irak, in which Muslims are being killed, are seen as attacks against Islam itself. They attack anything to do with America and the Christian west, from Embassy buildings, to their own neighbours, with whom they had lived together peacefully until now.”

Ifi: “Attempts are curently under way, to introduce Shariah as the basis for law and order in the remaining regions of Nigeria, such as Lagos, Oshogbo, Kano, Aba and Kaura. Could it be claimed that Muslims are bringing adherents of other faiths under pressure?”

Prof. Ike: “During this conflict about 10,000 people have already lost their lives. The pressure is on at all levels. Pressure in the political arena, through payment of money, or that supplies of finance are cut off. In some cases Christians have had to convert to Islam in order to be able to study at university, to go to school, or find work. The pressure is already very high. Muslim people have high positions in the military, in the secret service, as well as key political positions. In Islam, the command is to be personally active in supporting, using, and advancing religion, and this is currently being carried out by all available means in Nigeria.”

Ifi: “Can you tell us anything about the frequently alleged support for Islamic mission from Saudi-Arabia, Kuwait, Pakistan and Iran?”

Prof. Ike: “The principle of state-religion is forbidden in Nigeria. Religious freedom, and freedom of conscience are guaranteed by law. Christian groups, such as the “Christian’s association of Nigeria” – an alliance of christian churches representing a spectrum from Catholic to Pentecostal churches, are, amongst other things, fighting against the unconstitutional introduction of Shariah in the 12 regions. They are standing up for the maintaining of the constitution and existing law. Politicians and businessmen are attempting to fend off the “Islami-fying” of society, applying pressure in the opposite direction, and are appealing through newspapers and other media. Religion as the state-forming principle must be abolished, as it only brings unrest and war. Islam especially cannot be used as a neutral state religion. Muslims constantly use their political presence for the propagation of Islam. Christians build mainly schools and hospitals, whereas a Muslim must always first build a mosque. Christians must rethink the way in which they realise their views and convictions in society.”

Ifi: “What developments do you expect in Nigeria?”

Prof Ike: “ I view the situation very critically. Islam, and discussions about religion, are very sensitive areas, and have to do with world-views, convictions, and issues of faith. Some people die for their faith. Conflicts will increase in the future. The Muslim side will not give way. A civil society of citizens cannot be reconciled with Islam, because state and religion are not separated in Islam. Christians, however, want to separate state and religion, to preserve the civic nature of society, and hold up qualities such as fair play, humanism, brotherly love, and

mutual respect as their ideals. Islam does not particularly follow these goals, it has more to do with the propagation of Islam, living out religion, and obedience to Allah.

Poverty and illiteracy exacerbate the problem. The more enlightenment there is, the better the society. The Pope, with his readiness for dialogue, is setting a good example. I see dialogue, instead of war, as the way forward – dialogue on various levels, conducted in mutual respect and recognition of the other.”

Ifi: “Thank you very much indeed for the interview!”

„Schritte zur effektiven Da’wa“ – Praktische Anweisungen für den muslimischen „Missionar“

Christine Schirmacher

„Wer hätte etwas besseres zu sagen als der, der die Menschen zu Gott ruft, der tut, was recht ist und spricht: ‚Ich gehöre zu denen, die sich Gott ergeben haben?‘“ (Sure 41,33)

Da’wa - eine Form des Jihad

Wenn im westlichen Kontext von muslimischen Führern gefordert wird, die christlichen Kirchen sollten der Mission eine klare Absage erteilen, um den christlich-islamischen Dialog nicht zu behindern, wird häufig außer Acht gelassen, dass auch der Islam die Pflicht zur Propagierung seines Glaubens kennt, denn *“Der Islam ist von Anbeginn an eine missionarische Religion gewesen”*¹.

¹ Meaning and Significance of Dawah ila-Allah. A Guide to the Propagation of Islam. Markazi Maktaba Islami: Delhi, 1983, S. 43. Ich zitiere im folgenden ausschließlich muslimische Quellen.

Der der „Mission“ entsprechende Begriff „Da’wa“ bedeutet im Arabischen „Einladung“, „Ruf“ oder „Aufforderung“, die einzig wahre Religion des Islam und die Wahrheit des Korans anzuerkennen. Sie gilt Nichtmuslimen wie Muslimen, die den Islam nicht vollständig ausleben. Die Pflicht zur „Einladung“ aller Menschen oblag zunächst den Propheten, die Gott nach muslimischer Auffassung zu allen Völkern der Erde mit der Botschaft des Islam gesandt hat. Heute, nach der Sendung des letzten Propheten Muhammad (22,67) obliegt diese Pflicht der islamischen Gemeinschaft insgesamt (arab. umma) und, wie zahlreiche muslimische Stimmen betonen, auch jedem einzelnen Muslim: *„Jeder Muslim ist aufgrund seines Glaubens ein Missionar für den Islam“*². Jedem, der seiner Da’wa-Verpflichtung nicht nachkommt, wird am Tag des Gerichts dieses Versäumnis

² Ebd. 12.