

CAN ISHMAEL BE TAMED? RE-READING GALATIANS 4:21-31 (THE SEMIOTIC OF ISAAC AND ISHMAEL) AS A BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL RECIPE FOR ISLAMIC TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

No one doubts, as the contemporary socio-political events indicates that Africa, and Nigeria in particular is in the throes of religious crisis. The continent has become the theatre of war that is a washed with blood shed by multifarious Islamic terrorist sects whose Quranic source of ideology has often been adjudged faulty. This paper adopts the socio-critical method as represented in the studies of recent African Biblical scholars, which seek to interpret Gal 4:21-31 from the perspectives of contemporary African and Nigerian socio-political contexts. It attempts to engage the re-reading of this experience and writing of St Paul as he confronts his opponents in Gala 4:21-31, as one of the various theological conflicts that Christianity will ever confront. It involves the exploration of the semiotic of Ishmael and Isaac in the text and the understanding engendered which will serve as a theological recipe in the deliberate and precautionary steps for the interrelationship between Christianity and Islam, which can effect a positive socio political development of Nigeria.

Keywords: instruction, artificial intelligence, institution

Introduction

Of all the global problems which confront us today, the most recurrent and a grave danger is that of Islamic terrorism, a movement that seeks global domination at the expense of the lives of any one that do not subscribe to their extremist ideology. At first most nations of the world thought that the challenge of extreme Islamic terrorism was a war between the United States of America and a small group of disgruntled Muslims, until a closer look is been given to all other terrorist attacks that has taken place in other parts of the world, both before and after the September eleven, 2001 (Peter Ayuba, 2008). These include Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania, and the hijacking and blowing up of several air borne aircrafts like the Lockerbie affair. The springing up more recently of the Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda in the

Maghreb, the Al Shabab in Somalia, the more than one hundred episodes of Islamic related religious crisis and the recent Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria; the ISIL in Iraq and Syria, have shown that there is an organized plan by a few to terrorize, dominate and rule the world by extremists with the employment of the sharia as a legal code. These attacks have been seen basically as war against democracy, human rights, and simple reasoning and development. It has been a war against the church and Israel. ‘‘It is a war against global peace and stability which can be summarized as freedom under attack’’ (Peter Ayuba, 2008:12).

From the international and national level solutions to this socio-religious problem is being sought and especially from the theological perspective. It is on this note that an attempt is being made at re-reading Galatians 4:21-31 (the semiotic of Isaac and Ishmael) in the present quest with the aim, through the employment of historical critical method, to explore the experience of St. Paul and the Galatian Christians in the face of the judaizers opposition and bid to exterminate the nascent Christianity; the relevance of the Old Testament background as basis of the conflict, and as basis of Paul’s solution to the problem. More so, the present application and relevance of this solution to the Islamic terrorism and the present Christian church in Nigeria as the contemporary context is explicated, there is the drawing of appropriate implications and suggestions for global peace, the course for the peaceful development of Nigeria devoid of Islamic terrorism and religious violence is suggested.

2. Definition of Operational Terms

- i. **Semiotic:** The study of signs and symbols, takes the signs and decodes such signs primary from there worldviews (Guirand Pierre, 1975:), in this context Ishmael and Isaac are seen and understood as the two dominant faith in Nigeria – Islam and Christianity.
- ii. **Ishmael:** The son of Abraham through Hagar, the slave girl. This was the son that Abraham had with the advice of Sarah his wife since the promised child was yet to come. Ishmael was not to be the heir to the

lineage of faith, and the salvation plan of God that began with Abraham. Ishmael by nature was to be a wild ass of a man, and was the father of the 12 Arab princes, Gen 16; from where Islam as a religion originated.

- iii. **Isaac:** The son of Abraham by the promise of God, through whom Israel, Jesus Christ came, and the salvation plan of God had extended to all men Gen. 16. Christianity is the continuation of the Isaac lineage of faith.

3. Galatians 4:21-31 (The semiotic of Isaac and Ishmael)

3.1 Gal. 4:21-31 A brief review of literary opinions on Gal. 4:21-31.

In the discourse at Antioch, this passage was the final demonstration from scripture that the Law of Moses has no place in the Gentile churches and must be excluded from them. Christians must no longer look to the law observing church of Jerusalem as their mother church. Their true mother is the heavenly Jerusalem. It is implied that Jewish (law-observing) Christianity is an inferior form of Christianity which must lead its own life a part. There is no room in the Gentle churches for the Law of Moses (Agar) or for those who observe the law (sons of Agar) – whether these are Christians or not. St. Paul’s last word on the controversy as to who are the heirs of Abraham is ‘send away the slave girl (the law) for the son of the slave girl shall not share the inheritance with the son of the free woman that is Christians who do not observe nor derive their salvation from the law.

The argument is drawn from the law and the prophets, represented by Genesis and Isaiah (John Bligh, 1970). The argument from the law is typological but Paul used it as allegorical form, for in the house of Abraham there arose a crisis which do not only prefigured (as a type) but has been the basis (allegorical) that has now arisen in the church, which is the household of ‘the issue of Abraham’. The solution which God authorized in the earlier crisis is equally applicable to the latter day crisis. Send away the slave girl and her son (John Bligh, 1970).

The Antiochene exegetes, Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom, and some later commentators take the view that St. Paul has misused the word “allegory (John Bligh, 1970). They thought Paul could have used ‘type’. But many

exegetes have come to submit that there is a good deal to be said in favour of the view that St. Paul mean exactly what he says in v. 25 ‘‘These statement are allegorical’’ in which the family of Abraham stood for the essence and spiritual reality of the physical figures that were to spring up. The future that were symbolically embedded in Abrahams family included Christ through Isaac, the fulfilment of the promised seed, (salvation) and all those who will believe, (that is the church); then Hagar the slave girl and her son who were to be sent away as having no part in the house of Abraham, that is the Law, the unbelieving Jews, Ishmael and his descendants, both the physical and spiritual protégés. For Paul had correctly used the word ‘‘type’’ where appropriate like in I Cor. 10:11 (Hans Dieter, 1979).

3.2 The Literary Context of Gal. 4:21-31

Gal. 4:21-31 is the closing of this section of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, a section which started in verse one of chapter four in which Paul as part of his defense of the gospel of justification by faith and not by law, Paul showed the Galatians their folly in abundantly their new faith and going back into the darkness of legalism (Ernest De witt Burton, 1953). Abraham was justified by faith, not by works. Going bare into legalistic slavery can therefore be likened to the inferior position which Hagar and her son Ishmael had in Abraham’s family; the true her was Isaac the son of promise though Sarah the free woman, not Ishmael the son of a slave. Those who desired to live under the law are Hagar’s sons, whole those who live in Christ are children of Sarah. The law cannot annual the covenant of salvation (Sarah). It can only be a school master to prepare the way for Christ. It would be a tragedy for the Galatians to go back to Hagar and surrender to the Sinai covenant of the law.

3.3 The Socio Historical context of Galatians 4: 21 –31

This section of Galatians is called an allegory of freedom (4:21-31), and has its background from the Old Testament, ‘the issue of Abraham’ in Gen 16; 17; 21: 1-20, the result of which is the case of Ishmael and Isaac, sons of Abraham (Gen. 16:15: 21:3,9) (Donald Guthrie,1953). The scriptures represent Abraham as a pioneer of

faith and obedience, who walked with God, was a friend of God, and was taken into God's confidence. As a pioneer of faith, the mother of Ishmael, the oldest son, was Hagar, the slave of Sarah, the freewoman and wife, the mother of Isaac; the children of Abraham had their destiny determined in the drama that took place in Abraham's marital life. Abraham who was promised a son (Isaac) by God through whom his faith lineage would continue, had another son (Ishmael) outside the coverage of the promise. It was on this premise that Ishmael was born and so was regarded as being born out of the flesh and was not to inherit Abraham's lineage of faith and with no particular spiritual aspirations and no noteworthy contribution to make to the religious life of mankind (Daniel Arichea, 1976). It was the Isaac branch of Abraham's family that was to inherit Abraham's lineage of faith, inherited Canaan, and also gave Christ to the world. All of Isaac's good things, and Ishmael's fate had been determined by God before they were born. In the course of their growth in Abraham's house, Ishmael who was older had been displaying some dangerous life threatening playing tact on Isaac, on the basis of which Sarah insisted on the exit of Hagar the slave girl and her son Ishmael (Freedman H and Simeon M, 1939). The compulsory exit of Hagar and Ishmael was an issue that had divine sanction by God, and the unavoidable blessing of Abraham. On the tortuous path to a new location, God through an Angel also declared Ishmael's future to be that of the father of twelve princes, (the Arab nations) who will be rich, but Ishmael was also to be a wild Ass of a man, whose hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him, and he will dwell over in the midst of his kindred (Gen 17: 11-12)

This story was one of the effects and one of the causes of the perpetual feud between the Israelites and the tribes that descended from Ishmael (John Bligh, 1970). The Hebrews were so sure that God wanted them to have Palestine that they found no moral difficulty in saying that it was God himself who had overruled Abraham's conscience (Gen. 17:18-21). Consequently, even his circumcision at the age of thirteen could not make him a member of God's chosen people. However great this innocent victim of a family feud might become by virtue of the halfhearted blessing conceded by an uneasy conscience (Gen. 17:20-21), he and his descendants were

barred forever from the higher blessing. Theirs was to submit to the religious imperialism of the most favoured nation or die (Ernest De Witt Burton, 1977). Moreover, all Abraham's other son except Isaac were barred from the promise and sent away "unto the east country" (Gen. 25:5-6). And yet while all this was said to be the Lord's doing, it was in the same breath declared to be the doing of the human actors in this drama of the nations (Donald Guthrie, 1953). Sarah herself was said to have suggested that Abraham become a father by her Egyptian slave girl. Then, too, it was explained that Hagar's flight from the cruelty of her mistress was voluntary, making her, rather than the callous compliance of Abraham, responsible for her plight "in wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur" (Gen. 16:7).

3.3 A Brief Exegetical Discussion on Gal. 4:21-31

(a) The structure of Gal. 4:21-31

Most Scholars agreed that Gal. 4:21-31 can be divided into two subunits in order for a proper understanding and application of the message of the text. Subunit A: the terms of the allegory (4:21-26); sub unit B: the application of the allegory (4:27-31). While subunit A contain the retelling and usage of the actual historical event of Ishmael and Isaac by St Paul in his answer to the Judaizers sinister activity at turning the Galatians Christians back to the law from salvation by faith in Jesus who is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, subunit b, is the application of the promise at work in the lives of those who accept and those who rejects it.

(b) The exegesis of Gal. 4:21-31

This pericope consist of Galatians 4: 21-31 and there are various themes that formed the pericope, but in the context of this work, the themes that shall be explored are as follows:

The terms of the allegory (4: 21—26)

21. □□□□s law, the fundamental proof of Paul's gospel of grace and freedom was the Christian experience of new life in Christ. But in appealing to Jews who did not share that experience, he had to meet his opponents on the common ground of the OT, which they regarded as verbally inspired. So he challenged all who wanted to be under law to hear the law when it was read in the synagogues, and instead of losing themselves in the casuistry of the moment, to examine all the consequences of taking law instead of grace as the way of salvation (Ernest D W Burton, 1977). To Paul, since it is impossible for any man to keep all the laws, it is utter futility for any man to be laying claim to the law as his source of salvation, for the breaking of one law is the breaking of all. It is on this note that Christ, the seed of Isaac and of Abraham came as the fulfillment of the promise which was made to Abraham first, before the law came under Moses.

22. Ishmael and Isaac: To illustrate what happens to those who rely on the law Paul allegorizes the case of Ishmael and Isaac, sons of Abraham (Gen. 16:15: 21:3,9). The scriptures represent Abraham as a pioneer of faith and obedience, who walked with God, was a friend of God, and was taken into God's confidence. But his family life was marred by the favouritism and friction of polygamy and concubinage, which were to poison the future with feuds between Israel and his neighbours. The mother of Ishmael, the oldest son, was Hagar, the slave of Sarah, the freewoman and wife, the mother of Isaac, the child of promise.

23. The son of the slave girl, says Paul, was born according to the flesh. □□□□ ('flesh') has to be translated variously according to the context; in the present case the literal "flesh" does not convey Paul's meaning (Daniel C Arichea, 1976). Both sons were born with normal bodies, bones and muscles, blood and nerves. But the extraordinary thing in the Genesis story is the statement that Sarah was over ninety years old when Isaac, her first and only child, was born. Paul declares that this was possible only through faith. In this sense the son of the freewoman was born through promise. Some miss read "through the promise". Both readings have good support, but since Paul is contrasting "flesh" with "promise" in general terms, the reading without the article is preferable (Daniel Arichea, 1976). By comparison, says Paul,

Ishmael came into the world as an ordinary flesh-bound mortal, with no particular spiritual aspirations and no noteworthy contribution to make to the religious life of mankind. It was the Isaac branch of Abraham's family that accepted God's covenant, inherited Canaan, and gave Christ to the world: and all Isaac's good things, even as Ishmael's evil things, had been predetermined and promised before either was born.

24. When Paul says that these things are "allegorical utterance", he does not mean that the Genesis story is unhistorical myth, but he sees in it a religious meaning that ranges far beyond the literal history (Donald Guthrie, 1953). "Allegorical interpretation rests upon the belief that every word, figure of speech, and grammatical form in scripture has a special "spiritual" significance besides its literal meaning" (Donald Guthrie, 1953: 254). The theory is that the God who dictated it meant more than rests on the surface, and that while he said one thing, he also meant something else in addition to the literal sense (Donald Guthrie, 1953). Paul was not the first to allegorize a sacred book. The Greeks had long since applied the method to explain away the immoral things which the gods said and did in Homer and in their other religious authoritative poets (Donald Guthrie, 1953). Then Greek-speaking Jews, like Philo Judaeus, employed it apologetically to read Greek philosophy into the O.T., proclaiming that Moses had said all these good things long before and better than Homer and Plato (Ernest De Witt, 1977).

The wonder is that Paul has so little allegory. His restraint is explained partly by his training as a Pharisee (Ernest De Witt, 1977). The rabbis were suspicious of any interpretation of scripture that tended to make Jews lax in their observance of the law. Jews with Gnostic leanings, and those who considered some of their ancestral customs outmoded, could resort to allegory to justify their philosophy and conduct, while maintaining that they were the spiritual superiors of the conservatives who held to the letter of the law. But it was especially the moral earnestness which the spirit of Christ inspired in Paul that kept him from these extremes of allegorical speculation (Donald Guthrie, 1953). He had been nurtured in the Hebrew regard for the actual history of his people, and when he did allegorize, it was usually because he was driven to seek common ground in scriptural authority for his defense of his gospel. His

argument, however, is never strengthened by allegorical symbolism and typology, for these are convincing only to those who by imagination can find them so. Rather, as in Rom. 9-11, he introduces unnecessary complications such as the moral difficulties involved in predestination (Donald Guthrie, 1953). His gospel does not rest on the quick sands of allegory, a specious method of interpreting scripture. Its interpretations are of interest to the historian not as correct representations of what the writers and first readers of the bible had in mind, but only as source materials for understanding the life and thought of the allegorists themselves (Donald Guthrie, 1953).

It was not allegorical reflection, but Paul's unsuccessful inner conflict with his own intractable nature that drove him to conclude that all who were born "according to the flesh" were destined to slavery (Hans Dieter Betz, 1979). "Hagar", their mother, came from "Sinai", where the law and its curse were at home. All who refused the new covenant of faith forfeited their claim to be Abraham's children. Their punishment was to remain slaves in the "Jerusalem" that was the home of sinful human nature.

25. the allusion to Hagar, Sarah and Jerusalem in verses 25 and 26, can summarily be seen as reference to the early experiences of Hagar who had a child before Sarah, but was not the wife of Abraham nor whose son was it to inherit the promise, she as a slave was to be sent out, depicting a not lasting position or a position that has no permanency in 'the issue of Abraham', the salvation plan of God. Sarah though had a child later was the wife whose son as a free woman was to inherit Abraham, denoting the rightfulness the divine choice and permanency of her position over against Hagar that is the law (Hans Dieter Betz, 1979).

26. Two Jerusalems are contrasted and are seen as been depicted by Hagar and Sarah. While the law (Hagar and Ishmael) as of the time of Paul contend for the earthly Jerusalem. The Jerusalem which now is was a most unholy "Holy City", full of injustice, violence, and murder, and subject to the cruel and wicked rulers imposed by a Gentile empire (Donald Guthrie, 1953). But over against this Jerusalem of slavery lay an ideal celestial city, unseen at present, but destined soon to supersede it

(Donald Guthrie, 1953). Paul called it the Jerusalem above, Sarah, the freewoman, was the ancestress of its citizens, who were the people of faith and of freedom in Christ. She is called, Mother of us all (KJV) translates a text which added □□□□□□, “all”, from Rom. 4:16.

Paul speaks of Jerusalem above, because this new city of freedom already exists in heaven where Christ is, where dwell, the souls of those who have died in Christ. But it also exists on earth as the church, the body of Christ, who members are colonists from heaven sent to prepare men for the full establishment of God’s kingdom at Christ’s second coming (Phi. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3).

The biblical root of this conception of an ideal future and heavenly Jerusalem is Isa. 54. Other descriptions appear in Ezek. 40-48; Zech. 2:1-13; Hag. 2:6-9; Tob. 13:9-18; Ecclus. 36; Pss. Sol. 17:33. Historically the expectation assumed three forms. According to the earliest hope, God would build the New Jerusalem in Palestine and make it the capital of his theocratic world government. The plan of this glorious city was graven upon the palms of his hands (Isa. 49:16).” From this idea it was but a step, especially for those influenced by Greek ideas, to think of this ideal Jerusalem as already existing in heaven” (Donald Guthrie, 1953: 542). According to the Apocalypse of Baruch, God had shown it to Adam in Paradise before he sinned; to Abraham on the night mentioned in Gen. 15:12-21; and to Moses on Sinai, when he gave him the heavenly pattern for an earthly tabernacle (II Baruch 4:1-6; cf. Heb. 12:22). The third conception combined these two ideas. The Jerusalem which was “above” would come down to earth to be established in Palestine in place of the city that “now is” (cf. Rev. 3:12; 21-2, 10; II Esdras 7:26; 13:36; 10:54).

So the New Jerusalem belonged to both worlds and to both ages, to heaven and earth, to the present and the future. Its constitution was the new covenant, and its citizens were the men of faith in Christ, a new kind of freemen who traced their spiritual ancestry through the line of Isaac and his mother Sarah as heirs of God’s promise to Abraham. As for Ishmael and his tribe, they were the men of law, predestined to be slaves forever. Needless to say, the Judaizers found Paul’s allegorical exclusion of themselves utterly unacceptable. They believed that the

Torah was God's blueprint for all creation, and that is would be observed forever in the New Jerusalem. That, they said, was why God was going to purge the old city – to establish an order of life in which perfect obedience to his law would be possible (Donald Guthrie, 1953).

The application of the allegory (4:27-31)

27. A telling item in the counter propaganda of the legalists was the argument that even among the Christians only a radical fringe consisting mainly of foreign Jews, of whom Paul was one, were proposing to abandon the laws of Moses. In reply Paul quoted from a chapter of expansive hope which he found in the book of Isaiah⁵⁴.

In one respect his quotation of Isa. 54. 1 does not fit Paul's allegory. It was Sarah, the mother of freemen, who possessed the husband, and Hagar, the slave, who was the deserted woman. As usually with Paul's illustrations (cf. Rom. 7:1-4; 11:17-24), the details cannot be pressed without making them go lame; but his main point is clear (John Bligh, 1970). Since his contrast is between Hagar, the outcast, and Sarah, the wife, the definite article should be retained in translating □□□□□□□□, "the husband".

The Isaiah figure to describe the plight of Jerusalem during the Babylonian exile, which is now being used to mean the church of the new covenant was despised as an upstart religion, rejected by those who preferred the old covenant as time-tested and safe, and scorned because it had few members in comparison with other religions. Scanning the future with the eyes of faith, hope, and love, Paul assured his converts of victory and bade them rejoice because the day of rectification was at hand.

28. The Judaizers claimed that Abraham had obeyed the laws of Moses by anticipation, and that God's promise was his reward. Consequently the descendants of Isaac were children of promise only if they followed Abraham's example in obeying the law. Paul turned it the other way about: the promise must be taken on faith, not as credit for obedience. Sine this admonition was directed especially to Gentile Christians in Galatia who were enamored of law, it is better to read you (RSV

mg.) then we. The latter may be explained as a variant produced by assimilation to vss. 26 and 31. Note the absence of the article before □□□□□ children.

29. According to the flesh was always at war with according to the spirit. Neither phrase has the definite article in the Greek. By “according to flesh” Paul characterized Ishmael’s birth and rearing as those of a human being without benefit of God’s promise and the spiritual status which it conferred. But with Ishmael’s flesh-bound descendants he included those of the line of Isaac who refused to accept Christ and who continued to rely upon their Jewish upbringing and culture, which he himself had written off as a total loss compared with Christ (Phi. 3:2-11) (John Bligh, 1970). By “according to Spirit” Paul described the birth of Isaac, the child of promise, who typified the new humanity in Christ. Included in Isaac’s descendants were all, both Jews and Gentiles, who lived in the spirit by faith. For them God had prepared what “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man” (I Cor. 2:9) (John Bligh, 1970)

But, says Paul, all through history this Ishmael and his tribe of “flesh-men” have been persecuting Isaac and his “faith-men”. A rabbinical traditional of the second century A.D. interprets the Hebrew participle which in Greek (LXX □□□□□□□□) in Gen. 21:9 to mean that Ishmael’s “playing” became so rough that Isaac’s life was in danger. This son of a slave is said to have shot arrows at Isaac to kill him, and Paul’s statement shows that some such tradition was current in his day (Daniel Arichea,1976). He applied it to the Judaizers who were trying to force the Christians to observe the whole laws of Moses, and to the unbelieving Jews who were excommunicating the Christians and their families and getting them into trouble with the civil authorities (1:7; 4:17; 5:10; I Thess. 2:14-16).

30. slave woman: The quotation is from Gen. 21:10 omitting,□□□□□□ “this”, after □□□□□□□□□, “slave woman”, and substituting □□s □□□□□□□□s, “of the free woman”, for □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ “my son Isaac”, so as to make plain the parallelism of the allegory. The speaker of these words is Sarah, who is filled with range against Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham is represented as greatly grieved, but God is said to have sanctioned the demand of the

cruel and jealous wife. So Paul takes this scripture as the will of God for Isaac and Ishmael (John Bligh, 1970).

Paul's use of Abraham's expulsion of Hagar and her child has its parallel in the equally heartless treatment of Esau which he employees in Rom. 9-11 in his longer discussion of the divine process of selection (John Bligh, 1970). Here too it was assumed that the hatred generated by centuries of war for the possession of Palestine lay in the heart of God. "I hated Esau", said Malachi (1:3), making God the speaker; and Rom. 9:6-13 presses it to the utmost limit of predestination. But the love of God in Christ Jesus made Paul's heart better than his inherited doctrine, and it is in the light of the conclusion of his argument in Rom. 11:25-36 that his allegory of freedom in Galatians must be judged. When the history of the struggle for the possession of "the Holy Land" is allegorized to justify a doctrine of "election" which foredooms countless souls to an eternity of torment in a future hell, it becomes as morally atrocious as it is irreconcilable with Paul's gospel (Donald Guthrie, 1953).

Nevertheless, Paul's allegory gives the historian an insight into Paul's mind as he wrestled with the insoluble problem of God's sovereignty and human freedom. Throughout history certain individuals and groups, particularly the Hebrews, have risen higher and been more successful than others in translating their conception of God into the good life. Pioneers in religious thought and life have always been subject to persecution by those who want to stay on a lower spiritual plane (Daniel Arichea, 1979). Paul was one of these pioneers. He was forever right in his insistence that man's case is hopeless if God deals with him on the basis of obedience to law. He saw that the only sure freedom was that complete commitment to the grace of God in Christ which consists of faith, hope, and love, and balances liberty with obligation. These were the things which Paul was trying to bring home to the Galatians by means of his allegorical illustration.

31. The Greek does not have the definite article with slave – therefore, "of a slave". This verse states the conclusion which the Galatians are to draw from the whole argument in Chpts. 3-4. With it Paul writes his conclusion to his proposition that law is not, never was, and never will be God's way of salvation for man. All it

could do was to prove its own frustration through the weakness of human nature. By inciting the will to rebel it multiplied transgressions and compelled men to admit defeat, and thus served as a monitor to bring them to Christ. Only the men of faith were free; all others were slaves (Donald Guthrie, 1953).

3.4 The contemporary semiotic of Isaac as Christianity and Ishmael as Islam (Gal 4: 21-31 cf Gen 16: 10-12): a synthesis of the ‘birth Oracle’

Going through the history in the text of Gal 4: 21-31, which is derived specifically from ‘the birth Oracle’ of Gen 16 :10-12, in which attention is placed particularly and for this work which is Gen 16:12 : ‘‘He shall be a wild Ass of a man, his hands against every man, and every man’s hand against him: and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen’’, and unraveling the basis behind Paul’s argument and solution to the problem in his time, as it was in the time of Abraham, Abraham and his family especially Isaac and Ishmael were a type in the physical of the tribes, that is the Jews and the Arabs, and in reality of the religions that will emanate from them. While Abraham could be understood as the father in the place of God, Isaac stands for Christianity in status as the son and in destiny, in whom the whole world will be saved; Ishmael stands for Islam in its originality, status, purest form,(Bromely G.W,1982) disposition, character and destiny, that is a slave son in status, contentious, bold, strong, hostile, untractable, and untamable, not a people person, but that of furlong and friendless existence, a fierce person of no fixed lands who pitch its tent and feed their flocks, wherever they pleases; continually looking after prey, and seize on every kind of property that comes their way, (Hamilton Victor,1990) and of no redemptive purpose, but natural in his religion.

A brief exegetical note and understanding of this passage (Gen 16:12) as in the context of the present challenges of Christianity as an offshoot of Isaac is very expedient. Thus, from the text(Gen 16:12) the semiotic of Isaac as Christianity and Ishmael as contemporary Islam as has been enunciated down the ages, can be seen and understood in many ways which include the theological, social, economic and political.

Theologically, The two (Isaac and Ishmael) are sons of Abraham, Gen 16: 15, 21: 1,2.) , a people of faith, one was born according to and with the promise, so of a clear spiritual mandate and mission, (eternal role in the salvation of the world) the other was born according to the flesh, ordinary, so temporal. In particular, the promise at stake here is that “through you and your seed the whole world will be blessed, Gen 12:3, 17:7, 18:18, 22:18), and it was to this promise that Isaac was born, to be for Abraham as of that time and in the future as a figure, the immediate fulfillment of the promise and through whom the promise of God of salvation will continue till it reaches the whole world. On the other hand, Ishmael was born as a result of the need to satisfy the immediate biological need of Abraham of a child, but without any religious promise. If with the passage of time, it initiates anything of such nature, it will be self-willed. While in Isaac was the whole world to be blessed, that is saved; Ishmael was to be a great man, and a great nation with multitude of descendants (Gen 16:10), but was not assigned the higher blessing of salvation. Ishmael was to be the “wild ass of a man whose hand will be against his brethren (kinsmen), and his brethren’s hand will be against him, and he will live among them, or dwell over against all his kinsmen or brethren. (Gen 16: 11—12). The personality of whom a brief exegetical note is necessary in order to explicate the reason for the nature of Islam as the expression of Ishmael.

Wild ass of a man, Gen 16:12a: - Heb *pere adam.*, to run away, to run wild; and hence the wild ass, from its fleetness and its untamable nature, he will be a wild ass-man, The wild ass of the Arabian deserts is a very noble creature, and is one of the animals selected in the book of Job as especially exemplifying the greatness of God (Job 39:5-8) its characteristics are great speed, love of solitude, and an untamable fondness of liberty, fierce, and untamed, and unsettled, strong, free, roaming, suspicious, and untrustworthy animal, living wild in the desert, far from the haunts of men. This talks about Ishmael and his descendants, who as a wild ass of a man will be rude, and bold, and fearing no man, untamed, intractable, living at large, and impatient of service and restraint. Ishmael will be living in deserts and mountains, warlike, and violent, exercising himself continually in hunting beasts and oppressing,

robbing and plundering all that pass by (Bromely G W, 1982). He will be tough in character and rugged in mind, and will be rough in behavior. It is of note that, while an Ass is a beast of burdens for great works, tilling the ground, hauling of loads and properties, a wild ass will be very destructive, and very difficult to tame for domestic, creative, exploratory and progressive use in dispensing its strength and knowledge, for the advancement of human society. It will often be opposite, repressive, cruel, destructive, and dehumanizing use of strength and knowledge. It will not be for the liberation of man, instead, it will be for the enslavement of man in mind, ideology, practice and civilization. It will most often be out of tune with decency, and the human ideal for living. The wild ass of a man of Ishmael will also show in that of the forceful application of his own way, nature and ideology on people.

His hands against every man (Gen 16:12): This is the description of the rude , turbulent, violent, fierce, aggressive and hostile disposition nature of that is Ishmael,(Hamilton Victor, 1990) Ishmael can be bound by no treaty, submit to no law, and count plunder as legitimate gain (Clintock John, 1969) ,Signifying that he would be of a quarrelsome temper and warlike disposition, continually engaged in fighting with his neighbours, and they with him in their defense (Speiser, E A,1990) The general human society and Christian society in particular, will be offensive to him, and whose destruction he will be seeking. Most of the tenets, beliefs, practices and ways of life of the Christian church and society (such as the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, salvation in and through Christ, freedom of all men, freedom for the girl child, equality before the law, freedom of choice in marriage, Female leadership and sport, freedom of worship, education, economy, Democracy, right to own property, Jurisprudence, Christian holidays, Diets, clothing styles, Music, etc.) will be the *raison d'être* for its hatred for the Christian society(Pius Ajiki, 2016). As such, its destruction and replacement with its own will be the goal.

The claim to Abraham as father will give Ishmael's life a religious coloration and a sense of belonging to the household of Abraham's faith (Pius Ajiki 2016), but bereft of any prophetic, salvific and redemptive element and dimension. It will be the colouration of a tribal cultural trait and practice with a religious garment; and its goal

will be pursued with the wild ass of a man character. In the over all, there will always be the movement from Islamic society to Christian society; and the eventual forceful introduction and application of the religion and ideology (Hamilton Victor, 1990). While Isaac was of the peaceful, sublime disposition of love; with no forceful, coercive tendency of forcing any one into the faith, but that of persuasion; Ishmaels will be that of force. The promised blessing to Abraham and his lineage of faith, was to be freely given by God and freely received and supernaturally imputed by God on Isaac and his descendants. Ishmael, without a promise will be that of labour, self-effort at reaching and pleasing the divine (Pius Ajiki, 2016).

There is the status dimension in the semiotic and its theology, that is, Sonship and slaveship ideology in the two; the former of Isaac, the latter of Ishmael who will perpetually be struggling for freedom and living as such in his relation to the divine. It would be a perpetual struggle and relationship according to the basis of the existence of these two personalities as espoused by God in Gen. 16: 3; 21:10,11,12. This is the *raison d'être* for the Christian and Islamic relationship globally and in Nigeria in particular.

Furthermore, from the promise by God to begin to be fulfilled through Isaac, it is clear that the redemption of the fallen man was Gods target. The fact that man has fallen and in need of a Saviour who will redeemed him from his fallen nature and be made sons of God, new creatures, as opposed to the old natural Adamic fallen nature is the central salvific theme in the Bible for which reason the 'Christ event' was effected by God (Pius Ajiki, 2016). To this fact, Islamic anthropology differs, in that, man as natural as he is, only need to submit to Allah, observe the prescribed religious obligations, rituals, prayers, and other aspects of the faith to be acceptable before Allah, the Creator (Willord G Oxtorby, 2002) . This self-effort as prescribed for justification at the last day runs counter to the doctrine of the fall, as obtains in the Christian faith in which man needs a redeemer, to be saved, justified, the gift of a new life to be empowered by the Spirit, to live a free life before God. It is not a life of self- effort according to prescriptions but a life of Grace.

At the socio theological dimension which borders on the propagation and practice of the religions, while the charge for the propagation of the Christian gospel was given in Matt 28: 18-20, in which the good news of forgiveness of sins and salvation brought about to mankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus, was to be done in and through the languages of the people, and in the eventual of which, the cultures of the people will be ultimately transformed as practice by the redeemed. Through this process, the recipients of the gospel will be Christians and still remaining indigenously cultural. ‘‘Islam aims at cultural mutilation, destruction and unification with the Arabs, who are regarded as the custodian of the religion by other Muslims’’ (Peter Ayuba, 2008:12). Thus in the Islamic religion, the faith, the prayers and sacred texts are practiced, said and read in Arabic. This ultimately aims at establishing a global Islamic culture and people (Darull-Islam) a monoculture (Peter Ayuba 2008). This is another major pointer to the reason for the destruction at first, of any people and culture that dare oppose or resists this charge. This accounts for the destructions of the other civilizations by Islam in lands where it entered or conquered by Jihad, war. The Christian church works thought the language, native laws, customs and practices of people group, which are transformed and then raised in order to suit the expectations of Christian faith and practice. This is done without obliterating the language and culture of the people. In this, the languages and customs of the people are learnt, scriptures are translated into the languages and the indigeneity of the people groups are retained as tribal Christians(Justin S Ukpong, 1995). On the other side, to Ishmael, the economy, the social, like marriage, education, family relationship, inheritance, governance, justice, arts, dress and outlook, must be governed by the Islamic Sharia laws which must be strictly adhered to by the faithful’s (Pius Ajiki, 2016).

The understanding of life as members of the different faiths is at the opposite of each other. To the Christian faith, life is more of the spirit, a flow from the spirit to the body, there is the involvement of and leaning more on the supernatural in the daily walk, prayer, praise and practice of the Christian, with the miraculous and not mechanical routine observation of reading of prescribed scripts is secondary and less

important. Christianity also entails individuals loving and willing response, growth, and responsibility to the gospel in the society, and there is the separation between the secular government and the spiritual. The individuals, are given room to think, and develop themselves according to their personality and natural dispositions, as members of the human society. This engender growth and development of the society. Ishmaels approach to life is that of the engagement of natural strength, survival of the fittest, banditry, raid, and war, oppression, and battering of the weak or the conquered as non- humans and slaves, (Peter Ayuba, 2008).

And every man's hand against him Gen 16: 12 c : The diametrically opposed ideologies as upheld by Christianity and Islam, their ultimate goals as it affect human society, coupled with the approach to the achievement of their goals as missionary religions, means that why Ishmael remains, and Isaac remains, the contention will remain. The natural, innate and religious tendencies for the destruction of the other peoples of the world will always spring up from Ishmael. The taming of Ishmael by the Christian Church and society will continually be a task that is executed in many fronts. This taming will include prayerful vigilance, proper biblical research and teaching, conscious efforts at being alert to the threats inimically posed by Ishmael; advanced knowledge in the origin, nature, strategies and mission of Ishmael cum Islam in the world; development in technology and the sciences; proper understanding and strict adherence to multidimensional freedom as derived from the Bible and its democratic ideas and values for human life; through weapons of war for self-defense and deterrent; through sound Biblical evangelistic preaching and outreaches; and persuasions, by the Christians and the society at large from generation to generation.

He shall dwell over against all his kinsmen Gen 16: 12d: while there are varying opinions of the meaning of this text is that, Ishmael as a person and his descendants, will dwell in the east against the other Abrahamic tribes, or be dwelling in tents, or maintaining an independent dwelling from others despite all efforts at extirpating him (Hamilton Victor, 1990). Generally, it has been held that Ishmael in

what he stands for, that is the Islamic faith, will be dwelling among his brethren. Ishmael will live, dwell, that is, entrench himself among his brethren or kinsmen that is, among the people of Abraham, the Christians in particular and the world at large. Ishmael will be an inimical force to be reckon and contend with in the world and the Christians in particular (Speiser E A, 1990). He will see every other person especially the free Christian societies as target for forceful conversion, destruction and obliteration. It will not be 'a living with amicably', and not that of living to change or assimilate the cultures of others, but an entrenching with his nature, character ideology and mission (Peter Ayuba, 2008). Wherever its brethren, Christians are found, Ishmael will be there, where ever the Christian church and society exist, Islam will migrate easily as a target, and naturally, in different ways and garbs such as trade, wandering, as teachers, charmers, refugees, settlers' adventurers, raiders, warfare (Jihad) and eventual subjugations of the host community (Ahmad Mohammad Kani, 1990). This will be pursued till the eventual entrenchment of Islam is accomplished. This account for the migration among Muslims as opposed to that of Christians. The issue of migration in Islam comes up from many other social fronts due to the Islamic ideology of polygamy (marriage of one man to more than four wives), which eventually breeds population explosion, the struggle for resources; the repressive nature of an average Islamic society and the attractiveness of a Christian society with its freedom and liberty to life and property; and the socio-cultural and economic development of Christian society, that will be the pull for the migration of the Ishmaelites to such society(Anderso F.I., FreedmanD.N., 1980).

4. Gal. 4:21-31 and the Nigerian contemporary context

A proper understanding and implication of the biblical theological bearing of Gal. 4:21-31 on Nigeria can only be done when the religious background is done, which serve as the contemporary context of interpretation of the passage. This is done under the following subheadings:

4.1 Islam in Nigeria

It has been noted that Islam came to Nigeria in the 11th century and spread among diverse peoples especially in the northern part of Nigeria (Gbadamosi T.G.O. and Junaid M.O.O, 1997). The measure of its interaction with the people's indigenous culture and its influence has dictated the present Islamic cultures that now pervade among the people. Islam came in stages and penetrated such areas as the Kanem-Bornu, Hausa land and Yoruba land while there was peaceful spread of Islam through trade, and activities of Islamic teachers, "there was the ninetieth century Islamic Jihad that was carried out by Usman Dan Fodio, thereby creating the Sokoto caliphate at which demise the whole unite of Nigeria has had Islam as its dominant religion, while Yoruba land has almost an equal number of adherents with her Christian counterpart (Gbadamosi T.G.O. and Junaid M.O.O.,1997). There has been the influence of Islam in the area of urbanization, Islamic law and justice, Islamic scholarship, private and personal matters, Islamic ceremonies, marriages, inheritance, festival, pilgrimage, education, literary and linguistic influence and various sects of the Islamic religion in politics majority of the rulers of Nigeria as a nation has been Muslims. Muslims in Nigeria also share relationship with other Islamic world.

4.2 Christianity in Nigeria

The earliest attempt by Europeans to establish Christianity in the territory that became modern Nigerian was in the sixteenth century when the Portuguese gained entrance into the kingdom of Benin and Warri (Ayodeji Olukoju1997). The Christian Missionaries came to Nigeria with a three pronged Mission which include Christianity, Commerce and Western civilization, which were expected to supplant the barbarism that was supposed to prevail in darkest Africa. A much more lasting effort at planting Christianity in Nigeria came up again in the 1840, through the various missionary bodies such as CMS, RCM, SIM, DRM, etc. At present the Christian church has witnessed a tremendous growth and followership through the west (Yoruba land) the East and into the northern part of Nigeria. Three strands of the Christian church has been witnessed which include the easiest Muslim churches, the African independent churches and the more recently the Pentecostal churches,

with their aggressive style evangelism Christianity spreads generally the preaching and social works (Ayodele Olukoju, 1997). The impact of the faith in Nigeria has been enormous in such areas as education, the making of the new elites and political class, marriage, naming, theatre music, agriculture, architecture infrastructural. Most of the Christians churches in Nigeria have one link or the other with churches in Europe and America.

4.3 Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Religious crisis in Nigeria was very frequent in the Northern parts of Nigeria between 1980-1993, 1996-1997.2001 -2004, and the Boko -haram insurgency of 2006 till date (M T Yahaya, 2006). The nature of the crises range from religious Puritanism, such as in Kano, Bulunkutu, and Jimeta, 1980-84; to Ethno-religious crisis of Kaje versus Hausa-Fulani such as occurred in Kafanchan, Gombe and Funtua, 1985-1990. The conflicts in 1990-1993 in Katsina, Bauchi, Zango Kataf and Southern Zaria are part or extension of fundamentalist religious disturbances. Many lives were lost in these conflicts. Whereas the Maitatsine uprising in Kano (1980) had been purely religious, so also was the Shiite Uprising in Katsina (1991), Zaria (1996), and the Kafanchan incident which spread to Kaduna and Zaria. The Gombe riots (1985) were not purely religious. Bauchi/Tafawa Balewa (1991), Kafanchan/Kaduna (1987) and Zango-Kataf (1992) were more of ethnic political differences. It was ethnic quarrels between the small minority who are mainly Christians and are in the minority and the dominant Hausa/Fulani ethnic group who were in the cities of Zaria, Bauchi, Gombe, Funtua, Kano, the violence is seen in the light of its challenge to the Muslim or Islamic survival. The 2001-2004 are as a result of blasphemy against Islam or its founder by a European editor outside Africa. The 2010 Bokoharam terrorism has been that of Islamic insurgency at creating an Islamic caliphate in Nigeria. The areas most affected by these uprising had been the present areas of Katisina, Kano, Sokoto and Bauchi states. This extension affects Zamfara, Zaria, Keffi and Taraba states.

Apart from religion and ethnicity as causes for conflict, socio-political – economic reasons is also a factor. Various parts of Nigeria demonstrate stress because of poor management of resources evident through petroleum fuel shortages in 1998-2000 which affect cost of commodities, increasing cost of manufactured and imported goods, rising poverty and the increase in the gap between the haves and the have nots (Taiye Adamolekun , 2006). There is no doubt that part of the reasons for increasing poverty are stringent economic policies consequent upon the debt trap since Babangida the administration. Religion and ethnic conflict has threatened the corporate existence of the nation. Disintegration has been envisaged by the civil populace from all parts of the nation, viz., Northern Nigeria, Western Nigeria, Defunct Biafra, Ogoni, the Ijaws and Kano state. It is noted that the conflicts in Northern Nigeria is basically religious conflicts while that of the Southern Nigeria is ethnic and communal conflict.

The spread of crisis in Nigeria shows that the north has the highest volume of religious crisis. The Usman dan Fodio Jihad of the 19th century is a good example. History is replete with the fact that the north, before the incursion of the Fulani, was populated by the Hausa, and were well organized politically. Religiously, they were already Muslims. The ‘purification’ exercise of the Jihad was indeed the ‘Fulanization’ of the northern political hegemony (Igboin Benson Ohihon, 2010). Everywhere that crumbled under the conquering power of the Jihadists received a Fulani as its political head. The consequence of this had been long lasting. The recent Plateau conflict attests to this historical fact. Although the geography of religion has been largely confined to mere descriptive work, the fact of the interdependence between landscape and religious phenomena and behaviours cannot be denied. When this is placed vis-à-vis the recurring nature of religious recurrence in the north, it can be understood that the hostile climate can be a contributive factor. While there may be other factors responsible, this paper focuses its attention on the Biblical theological factor.

4.4 The Boko Haram Islamic Terrorism in Nigeria

The Boko Haram Islamic terrorist group has been the most recent and brutal in its operation and ideology. In a bid at establishing an Islamic caliphate in North East Nigeria, the group since its inception in 2010 has killed over 13,000 people destroyed villages and towns and had other 1.6 million Nigerians displaced while some had sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Chad, and Nigeria while there was an international coalition of 8500 soldiers from Nigeria, Chad Niger and Cameroun, the group who had earlier sought affliction with Al-Qaeda, had now declared its allegiance to ISIL (online at [www. Bokoharam in Nigeria](http://www.BokoharaminNigeria.com), 2015). This is an effort at giving room for more Islamic militants from across the globe to join in the Jihad in Nigeria over 400 girls had been kidnapped and must have be shared among the fighters, and some sold as sex slaves, under the pretext of being booties of war according to the Quran.

5. Can Ishmael be tamed? The implications of Gal. 4:21-31 and Islamic terrorism in Nigeria

Re-reading the Gal. 4:21-31, in which the practices of the two dominant religions in Nigeria and the Nigerian state as the contemporary context, leads to the following submission about Ishmael as characterized by the extreme practice of Islam in Nigeria.

- i. The reflection of the wildness of Ishmael whose hand will be against his brethren and he will live over among them (Gen. 16:12) is a text that has always resonate in the minds of Christians, each time there is a religious riot in which Muslims went on the rampage. The manner, the coordination, and fearlessness that are shown, seem most often as an issue that had preoccupied the mind of the people, before such conflicts erupt. The suicide bombers who are tagged as martyrs, the reference and call to Jihad not minding the consequences, has puzzle the bible readers of the untamable character of Ishmael.

- ii. Can Ishmael be tamed when there are passages in the Quran that legitimize, Jihad, as legitimate wars against the infidels that is non- Muslims, until they are either converted forcefully or are exterminated by death (Jerry Rassamni, 2006).
- iii. Most non Muslim scholars of Islam, acknowledge that the ultimate goal of Islam in any society is an Islamic state, and that while the Muslim are in
- iv. minority in any society, such verses of the Quran that showed the nascent Islam in Mecca will be used, but when the religion has gained ascendancy, the Medina verses of the Quran (post Hejira) verses of an Islamic state is invoked (Jerry Rassmani, 2006).
- v. Taming Ishmael in Nigeria will be a serious and deliberate multidimensional task of the church, when the Islamic socio-political ideology is that of a theocratic philosophy in which Allah is the ruler through the caliphs, in which the only political ideology is that as enshrined in the Islamic holy books (Peter Ayuba,2008).
- vi. The Arabness of Islam is a strong factor, in which the practice of Islam among any tribe that have not been fully Arabized, is seen to be different from the Arabized societies. The traditional pre-Islamic Arab, socio-cultural life which is the underpinning of Islam, such as raids, Jihad, warfare, religious dominated practices, cannot allow Ishmael to be tamed.
- vii. A socio-cultural practice in which free thinking and reasoning as obtained in Western societies is muzzled, except that which has been written in the holy book, under a different life setting, as contrary to modern realities is an obstacle to taming Ishmael.
- viii. In Nigeria, many Christians have observed that, it is true to call the religions, or define the religions by what they do, the way people see them, the better, in order to tame Ishmael.
- ix. While the overall goal of Islam is the establishment of the rule of Allah, on earth and this at times with the use of force, war – Jihad, the loss of life, the

absence of the free response of individuals conviction, portrays Ishmael as one that need to rethink, and re-evaluate its religious role and the essence of religion to mankind generally.

- x. The approach of Ishmael to the socio, economic realities of the 21st century need to be re-examined.
- xi. As Isaac, in the house of Abraham, the theological assurance for the victory and continual existence and growth of the Christian church is a biblical ontological factor.
- xii. As a people of dual citizenship and nature, the Christian church must engage in practically in the theology of prayerful vigilance in order to curtail the spiritual forces that do instigate the Jihadists in our contemporary time.
- xiii. Cautious steps to understand, and properly relate with Islam in Nigeria must be engaged by the church.

Conclusion

The question of whether Ishmael can be tamed, must be consciously addressed by the Christian church in Nigeria through multi dimensional approach. The socio, political, religious and psychological measures must be taken to avoid incessant loss of lives, riots, and senseless destructions that always entail every religious riot in Nigeria. As a theological issues, prayers, proper study, enlightenment, dialogue, and constructive evangelistic approach must be engaged in Nigeria by the church in order to safeguard her existence and still have a conducive atmosphere for healthy development of Nigeria.

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