

Killing In Allah's Name

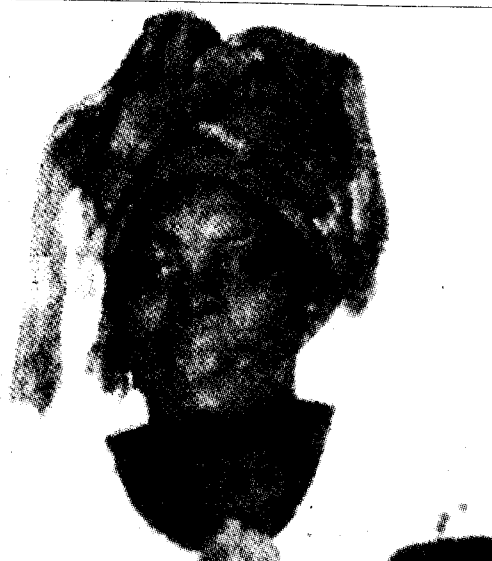
The killing of Oluwatoyin Oluwaseesin, a contract teacher at the Government Day Secondary School in Gandu, Gombe State, by a group of fanatical Muslim students, reopens the question of religious tolerance

BEN ADAJI/Gombe

In the past few days, Oluwafemi Oluwaseesin, a physiotherapist at the Federal Medical Centre, Idi-Aba, Abeokuta, Ogun State, and his two kids have known everything but joy. Currently, they are mourning somewhere in Lagos, following the killing of Oluwatoyin, wife of Oluwaseesin. The family's grief deepened on 24 March, when the remains of Oluwatoyin was buried at Abeokuta, Ogun State, three days after she was killed by her students.

During the burial proceedings, which held at the Idi-Aba Baptist Church in Abeokuta, Temiloluwa, the younger of the late Oluwatoyin's children, who is just 10 months old, reacted as if he felt the grief. The baby twisted, turned and wailed uncontrollably when his mother's corpse arrived the church premises.

Everybody present was touched. Reverend Matthew Ogundeji, minister in charge of the proceedings, said an event of this nature should not be taking place in the country. "I blame the government for this. I mean federal, state and local governments. You can imagine that this young man has been rendered a widower, while his children are now motherless. Yet, those who are in charge will pretend as if all is well. It is not! This is not the first time this kind of thing will happen. That is the more reason we are saying it is



• The late Oluwatoyin Oluwaseesin.



• Oluwafemi and their son.

enough. Though, in the spirit of this Easter, we have chosen to forgive and forget. But we want the government to know we are very displeased with the situation," Ogundeji said during the service.

Forgive and forget? Achieving one, let alone both, will task Oluwaseesin's soul.

All through the service, the widower's eyes mirrored agony. Oluwafemi's agony began on 21 March, when his wife was murdered by an irate group of fanatical Muslim students of the Government Day Secondary School in Gandu, Gombe State. According to Dr. Felicia Akinrenmi, a consultant physiotherapist and Oluwaseesin's boss, Oluwaseesin said he wanted to phone his wife on the day she was murdered. But he could not because there were network problems. Oluwaseesin later left for where he thought the reception could be better. "When I didn't see him on time, I decided to check him out. As I got closer, I heard something like 'my car has been set ablaze.' Then he said: 'Why don't

you leave the car and run for your life.' But later, we heard nothing. That was around 9 a.m. And I am sure that was when the incident occurred," recalled Dr. Akinrenmi.

She wondered if there were no policemen where the incident occurred. "I even heard the school is just behind the Emir's Palace. Is it that they didn't hear any noise?" she asked in exasperation.

Before her murder, Oluwatoyin was assigned to invigilate Senior Secondary School students who were writing their end of term examination in Islamic Religious Knowledge. She was also said to have secured another job in Abeokuta, something that would have brought her back together with her husband. Prior to the commencement of the examinations, she was said to have gone round the school, bidding farewell to students and



• Revd. Matthew Ogundeji.



• Governor Danjuma Goje

Oluwatoyin's pleas failed to melt the hearts of his assailants, who eventually slaughtered her, dumped the corpse in the booth of her burning car

teachers.

Trouble began for Oluwatoyin when she noticed that a female student came into the examination hall with her handbag and a textbook concealed in a copy of the Qur'an. On sighting the cheating student, Oluwatoyin was reported to have seized the book. To deny access to the offending material, she threw out the book as well as the handbag. That was to prove fatal. Unknown to her, the book covering the textbook was the Qur'an.

Immediately the books flew out, the students began chanting *Allahu Akbar*, meaning God is great and claiming that the Qur'an was among the books confiscated by Oluwatoyin. And for that, they vowed she must die.

Armed with knives and cutlasses, they started chasing Oluwatoyin, who was said to have sought refuge in the school principal's office. Her action proved inadequate, as the students insisted she must die for desecrating the Qur'an. They stepped up their attack by breaking into the principal's office. They dragged Oluwatoyin out, stripped her and started hacking away.

Oluwatoyin's pleas failed to melt the hearts of his assailants, who eventually slaughtered her, dumped the corpse in the booth of her burning car. After that, the students turned on Malam Mohammed Sadiq, their principal, and beat him to a pulp for offering refuge to Oluwatoyin.

Still, their anger continued to flare, as they proceeded to burn down three classroom blocks, the school clinic, the administrative block and the library. While they engaged in their destruction,



• Inspector-General of Police, Sunday Ehindero.

Meanwhile, Joseph Ibi, Gombe State Police Commissioner, revealed that 12 people have so far been arrested in connection with the murder. But CAN remains unimpressed by the steps taken so far.

Reverend Ndukuba said CAN has rejected the committee set up by the state government, suggesting the establishment of a judicial commission of inquiry that will identify those involved in the killing, with a view to bringing them to book. CAN also condemned speculations that Oluwatoyin touched the Qur'an, insisting that the Qur'an was not among the books allegedly thrown out of the examination hall.

The association declared a week of fasting and mourning for all Christians in Gombe State. It also directed all Christian teachers in Muslim-dominated schools in the state to stay away from the institutions until further notice.

• Additional reports OLUSOLA OLAOSEBIKAN/Abeokuta.

news of Oluwatoyin's killing filtered into town, sparking fears of an outbreak of religious crisis.

Worried by the situation, Alhaji Danjuma Goje, Gombe State Governor, visited the town. He met Oluwatoyin's body still burning in her car. Goje was said to have ordered the immediate closure of all secondary schools in the state. He also ordered immediate deployment of soldiers and policemen to strategic points in the state, especially churches. On 23 March, Goje announced the constitution of a committee to review the unfortunate incident.

The committee, headed by Zubairu Umar, Gombe State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, is to, among other things, condole Oluwatoyin's family and members of the church she attended. The committee, which has two weeks to complete its assignment, is also to suggest steps to forestall a recurrence.

Other members of the committee include the representatives of the state Police Commissioner and the State Security Service, Sheikh Adamu Jibo, Chief Imam of Gombe State; Reverend Henry Ndukuba, Chairman of Gombe State Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN); and Dr. Sani Jauro.