
"Beyond Amnesty: Religion as a Tool for Homeland Security in Nigeria"

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Abstract

Disasters and terrorism make the world an insecure home for humankind. From the militant movement of several groups fighting in the Niger Delta, a new form of insecurity has arisen: Boko Haram. While political amnesty has failed to curb the youth's thirst for gun-waving in the Niger Delta, the use of force has failed to curb the menace of Boko Haram in the Northern part of this country. To confront the multifarious internal security challenges, this paper examined the historical antecedents of these conflicts. The paper discovered that the failure of the government to address the socio-economic needs of the youths has, in a large measure, facilitated these conflicts. It also discovered that the removal of religious studies as a core subject in the school curricula of all tiers of education in Nigeria since the early 70s in no small measure contributed to the moral and social endemic corruption that is the bane of the country. The paper therefore is of the opinion that if religion is used as a tool for dialogue much will be achieved in terms of homeland security in Nigeria. The paper proposes the use of several religion-based institutions as a line of first attack in handling social conflicts rather than the use of military and Police force. It argues that if religion is used as a tool for national orientation, much will be achieved in reducing the incidences of corruption which in turn will reduce the rate of social conflicts.

Conflict and Insecurity

According to Carter McNamara (2008), "conflict is when two or more values, perspectives and opinions are contradictory in nature and haven't been aligned or agreed about yet." Such values could be within one's self when one is not living according to his values. It also comes up when one's values and perspectives are threatened or from fear of the unknown or from lack of fulfillment." It is against the background clashes of values, perspectives and opinions that we have to situate the conflicts and the insecurity situations in Nigeria today.

According to Wikipedia (web search) the conflict in the Niger Delta arose in the early 1990s over tensions between the foreign oil corporations and a number of the Niger Delta's minority ethnic groups who felt they were being exploited, particularly the Ogoni and the Ijaw. "Ethnic and political unrest has continued throughout the 1990s and persists as of 2007." Competition for oil wealth has fueled violence between many ethnic groups, causing the militarization of nearly the entire region by ethnic militia groups as well as Nigerian military and police forces.

The militants, as they became known, formed various organizations to champion their cause, notable among them being the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Thus Prof. Onigu (2009) opined that "the current conflict is more complex, a crisis involving local patriots and freedom fighters." When it became obvious that the might of the military could not put an end to the Niger Delta crises, the late Head of State, President Shehu Musa Yar' Adua, in a Presidential pronouncement on June 24, 2009, declared a blanket amnesty for all the militants in the Niger Delta who voluntarily surrender their arms. Though Jomo Gbomo, spokesman of MEND, said that as freedom fighters, the amnesty was not for members of MEND, but that it was "directed at criminals such as armed robbers, rapist, kidnappers seeking ransom" (Olukoya, www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=48029), a total of 20, 191 militants were reported to have renounced the arms struggle to embrace the amnesty program (Ebhuomhan, www.234next.com/csp/cms/...amnesty_programme_in_jeopardy_cs_p).

However, the enduring insecurity in the region is evidenced by the upsurge in kidnappings, robberies, destruction of oil pipelines and other crimes involving the use of arms in spite of the amnesty. Suleiman Abba, Commissioner of Police for Rivers State, identified the ex-militants as those responsible for these acts of insecurity (Editorial, *The Nigerian Inquirer* 29 April, 2010). Additionally, MEND continued her attacks, claiming responsibility for a car bomb explosion at the venue of a post-amnesty conference in Warri on March 15, 2010 (www.allafrica.com/stories/201003151420.html).

While the Niger Delta militants were creating all kinds of insecurity problems in the southern part of the country, a group sprang up in the North to fuel further the security challenges of the Federal Government: Boko Haram! According to Wikipedia "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" (Arabic: *Jamā'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lādda'awatih wal-Jihad*), better known by its Hausa name Boko Haram, is a violent jihadist

terrorist organization based in the northeast of Nigeria. It is an Islamist movement which strongly opposes man-made laws (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram). Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2001, the organization is a Jihadist group that seeks to establish sharia law in the country. The group is also known for attacking Christians and bombing churches (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram).

On August 18, 2011, *The Vanguard Newspaper* reported the bombing of the United Nations Building in Abuja, Nigeria's capital city by Boko Haram members. On December 4, 2011, the same paper reported: "The suspected members of the radical Boko Haram sect, armed with heavy machine guns, threw explosives and fired into a police compound in the town of Azare, setting the buildings on fire, residents said." *The Nation Newspaper* on August 9, 2012 reported the capture of three Boko Haram members who had attacked a Deeper Life Church in Okene, Kogi State of Nigeria, killing more than 20 people: "Three people, including a woman, who are believed to be the prime suspects in the killing of 20 worshippers in a church in Okene, Kogi State on Monday, have been arrested, the police said yesterday." The catalogue of killings by the Boko Haram sect can go on and on.

The security challenges of the militants in the Niger Delta and the Boko Haram in the North East have created serious homeland security problems for the Nation. The bombing incidents became so bad from December 2011 to date, that it resulted in the abrupt removal from office of the immediate past Inspector General of Police and the immediate past National Security Adviser. These actions by President Goodluck Jonathan show the extent that Homeland security has constituted a major headache to the present administration. Gabriel Agbo (2012), reacting to the recent call by the Boko Haram that President Jonathan should either resign or convert to Islam if he wants peace in the country writes: "At last, this terror group that has murdered thousands of Nigerians and some foreigners has laid its demands on the table. It is political as well as religious. They and their sponsors want to take over government and Islamise Nigeria."

Globalization and Insecurity in Nigeria

James Kurth defined globalization as "the first truly world revolution." (<http://www.fpri.org/fpriwire/0707.199905.kurth.religionglobalization.html>).

Globalization which started long ago as a gradual process has progressed from imperial occupation and colonization of weaker nations by Western States to invasion of private homes and "reprogramming" of individuals through electronic

devices. It continues to cut across borders, customs and belief systems, thereby severing socio-cultural relations and causing insecurity.

Donald R. Taylor, writing on the subject, "The Christian Confronts Culture", defines culture as "the sum total of what any nation, people or tribe is all about" (Taylor, 1994:42). The Nigerian people had their diverse cultures before the coming of the Europeans. These included their different and unique languages, religions and economic resources. The aim of the highly developed nations of the world, particularly the G8, has been to make the world a global village under their leadership. As such, since they began to interfere in, and alter the cultures- languages, beliefs and economic resources- of the local peoples, there have been problems of insecurity all over the world. These problems may change form, but the end result has always been insecurity. When late Osama Bin Ladin and his group hit some targets in the United States of America in 2001, it became obvious that terrorism had assumed a global dimension.

Since September 11, 2001 it has become clear how globalization facilitates insecurity. Romesh Ratnesar, writing for TIME magazine of July 23, 2001 notes: "Some of the manifestations of globalism have made it easier to demonstrate against it: the internet facilitates exchange of protest strategy, the English Language's conquest of Europe [and the world] gives the polyglot protesters a common tongue...." The radio, the television, the mobile phone and the internet have facilitated global insecurity in recent times. In Nigeria, it has not been different. The answer to the questions of how and from where do militants acquire their arms is found in the one word: globalization.

In 2009, a self-styled "Nigerian Taliban" group caused mayhem in Northern Nigeria. By the time the dust was clear, over 100 persons were dead, government establishments, including security agencies' offices were burnt down. It was reported that the membership of this group was mainly drawn from University dropouts. No matter how uneducated these militants may be their choice of the sect's name -Taliban- and their cause was informed by agents of globalization, taking after their mentor: Osama Bin Ladin! The radio which is a multi-lingua media outfit, and the television which has no restraint in broadcasting violence, have connected these local militants with the events happening in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria and other volatile Islamic states. Militant "freedom fighters", after creating havoc, make their actions known to the whole world through emails, satellite phone calls and internet posts, whereby they claim responsibility for the acts of insecurity. Kidnappers

communicate with families of hostages through mobile phones, demanding their ransom.

Bureaucratic Failures in Handling Homeland Security

As long as violence persists from dissident groups called by any name, it is clear testimony to the failure of the approaches to solving the insecurity problems of the country by the Federal Government. The military and the political approaches at alleviating insecurity arising from the Niger Delta militancy and Boko Haram have failed to stem the tide of pipeline vandalization, crude oil bunkering and illegal refineries in the Nigeria Delta. In spite of the sophisticated military hardware provided for the police, the Boko Haram continues to hit hard core targets in and around the Northern part of the country.

The problem of insecurity arising from the Niger Delta is rooted on socio-economic issues - resource control and development. International organizations like the United Nations, the Commonwealth, and the G8 betray the inequality among nations in global economics, in favour of countries of the North Pole and to the detriment of those in the South. The South Commission's (1993: 283) members, who included Julius Nyerere, lamented in their report that: "In international economic relations, the South is not allowed a fair share but is exploited. So far from participating in decision making at the world level, it is in fact excluded." The agenda of economic summits or trade talks are being "pushed by the world's largest multinational corporations, which traditionally have used the WTO secretariat and negotiators of the world's most powerful countries to write the rules of the global economy in favour of expanding their profit margin" (Lori Wallach and Deborah James, <http://www.commondreams.org/views06081433.htm>).

The question that begs for answer is: why has amnesty failed to resolve conclusively the Niger Delta insecurity challenges? Equally disturbing is the question of why the military might of the Federal Government has not been able to halt the spate of bombings by the Boko Haram. The first setback to the amnesty program is that not all militant groups accepted the offer, especially MEND. In an email interview with IPS, Jomo Gbomo, spokesman for MEND says, "Our position remains the same. We do not identify with an amnesty that does not give room for dialogue and fails to address the root issues that gave birth to the struggle" (Olukoya, www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=48029). To MEND, their struggle is aimed at "reversing unjust treatment of local communities after more than five decades of oil exploration" (Olukoya,

www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=48029). As a means to an end, they have therefore adopted militant measures to send this message to the multinational oil companies, the federal and States governments, and to the world at large. Some of these measures are kidnapping and blowing up of oil pipelines and other facilities in the creeks.

The Christian Science Monitor on August 21, 2012 reported that "the Nigerian government has confirmed that it is in dialogue with Boko Haram, the militant Islamist group notorious for terror attacks against Christians and others across the country's restive north." According to the Minister of Information, Labaran Maku, "The government is willing to negotiate because of the security challenges posed by the group who are attacking security formations, universities, and other government formations," said Mr. Maku. "The government welcomes any initiative that will usher in peace, security, and tranquility in the country, especially in the light of the security challenges that we have faced in the last two years." (<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2012/0821/Nigerian-government-enters-talks-with-Boko-Haram>). From the statement credited to the Minister of Information, it is clear that the Federal Government is ready to explore all available avenues to tackle the problems of homeland security. It is against this background that this paper wishes to suggest religious principles as a better tool for handling homeland security issues.

Beyond Amnesty: Religion as a Tool for Homeland Security.

Religious Principles and the Niger Delta Militancy

The resurgence of interest in religion in the 21st century is as a result of its effectiveness in handling socio-economic and even political issues. Most nations of the world are gradually realizing the ineffectiveness of secularism in eradicating insecurity and other vices and in sustaining peace and security. The failure of communist Russia and the gradual return of religion to that country is a great testimonial to this fact. The University of Maryland, USA (<http://www.amst.umd.edu/PRCG/about.html>) has been using the "Project on Religion, Culture and Globalization" to "bring together faculty, staff, students and community members to encourage research, dialogue and the sharing of resources on academic issues that traditionally have not been addressed by the campus community". Religion was added to the project, primarily to "provide a heretofore untapped opportunity to understand the deep-rooted - and typically unspoken - assumption on which individuals and peoples base their world views." In August 2007, the University of San Francisco organized a symposium on "Globalization and its Discontents: Modernization, Culture and Religion". Its aim was to "offer a comprehensive framework for addressing prospects for the

peaceful evolution of people and societies in the third millennium" (<http://www.ji3.org/symposuim2007-html>). By this time, a "remarkable resurgence of religion, along with national and ethnic communities seek to retrieve traditional sources of individual and group identities in a world of "future shock", punctuated by the successive waves of agricultural, industrial and post-industrial revolutions" would have come to stay.

TIME magazine reported that religion is thriving in Africa. Actually, the zeal for religious ceremonies is evident, but what is lacking is a true application of its principles in the handling of socio-economic and political issues, particularly homeland security. Hence T.B. Bottomore notes that "the sociological study of religion... has been characterized especially by a concern with the ethical doctrines of the world religions" (Bottomore, 1972: 239). Jean Jacques Rousseau argues that "nothing can take the place of morality in the maintenance of government" (Rousseau, 1952: 372b). Morality is the fruit of true religion and the mother of good governance, social justice, peaceful co-existence, religious and ethical tolerance, honesty, effective compassion, etc.

In other words, the moment political leaders begin to imbibe the ethical principles of religion in the management of their political offices, corruption will not only be reduced to the barest minimum, but the needs of the masses will become paramount on the agenda of project actualization by agents of government. If this principle is applied to the Niger Delta crises, the problem of militancy will cease within a very short time. C.S. Lewis, the 20th century Christian apologist, believed that our social problems would be quickly solved if only people with true religious principles were to be allowed to be statesmen and economists (Lewis, 1960: 79).

Dan Bryant (<http://www.highbeam.com>) writes: "The current war on terrorism was initially conceived as a war against evil itself. The faith, in which I was raised, however, taught me that evil cannot be fought with guns and bombs. It is not a military problem. I fear that we have confused putting an end to evil with killing evildoers and because we do not understand the difference, we become the doers of evil ourselves." Both with the Niger Delta militants and the Boko Haram sect, it is clear that brute force can never be the solution to homeland security. General Bradley, decorated World War II veteran and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States of America opines: "The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war

than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living (<http://www.highbeam.com>).

Marvin Silver in an article in The Chicago Defender of November 15, 2006 writes:

"It is whether we have tried to relieve the plight of the poor and those who have been stripped of their basic democratic freedoms such as the right to vote; whether we have tried to transform this war-torn world into a world free from oppression and exploitation; whether we have tried to change a global economic system that devalues work and workers and strived to build a health care system for all; whether we have tried to fight for the rights of children, the disabled, and those who are genetically different from us, and held our political leaders accountable for how they set public policy (<http://www.highbeam.com>)."

The struggle of the militants in the Niger Delta is about resource control and provision of social amenities. If religious principles are used in accessing the agitations of the militants rather than economic factors, there will be easy solution. Both Christianity and Islam teach that you should do unto your neighbor what you want him to do to you. Using this religious principle alone, political office holders will know that exploitation of the resources of the Niger Delta without concomitant improvement in the social and economic lives of the people is a crime against humanity. Once this philosophy is adopted, no one needs the amnesty program. The multi-national companies will be made to invest more of their earnings in the development of their working environments, and thus the Niger Delta youths will not only be gainfully employed, but will themselves become employers of labor.

Religious Principles and the Boko Haram Insurgency

In his article "Rethinking the Religious Education Curricula in Nigerian Schools," Jawoniyi (2009) considered the "probable justifications for deploying the confessional model of religious education, accentuating the possible violations of the principles of religious freedom necessitated by the deployment of the confessional pedagogical model in Nigeria's publicly funded schools." He argued that "in consonance with contemporary trends in religious education in Europe, Australia, Canada and South Africa, to mention a few," there should be a "substitution of the currently deployed confessional, mono-religious education curricula with a non-confessional, multi-faith religious education curriculum."

It is this type of thinking that has led to the situation whereby religious education is treated, not as a morally enhancing subject, but as an academic exercise. Nakpodia (2010) treats the church and mosque as agencies in the educative process and curriculum development. He writes: "The major role of the church and the mosque is in moulding the character of the child and the people in general." In other words, while the school is to teach the academic aspect of religion, the church and the mosque are saddled with the responsibility of moulding the character of the child.

The scenario painted by the two scholars quoted above can be described as follows: in the public schools, don't teach confessional religion because that is what obtains in Europe and elsewhere. Instead allow the church and mosque to teach confessional religion while the schools teach academic religion. Are we then surprised that when religion was being used as a tool of violence and killing of fellow human beings in the Western world it had to inevitably get to Nigeria. You reap what you sow; we wanted to be like the Western world, preaching the gospel of secularity of the State. Killing in the name of religion is what we are getting for propagating the gospel of religious secularity.

Imagine a situation where the suicide bombers of the Boko Haram grew up in primary and secondary schools with their Christian counterparts, learning about Christian and Islamic ethics in the same class. It will be almost impossible to see such children turning around to kill one another in the name of religion. But because we left the task of character moulding entirely to the church and the mosque, each religion was free to teach its adherents its ethical principles without recourse to the ethical principles of other religions. It is will be impossible for you to teach a Muslim child to kill a Christian in the name of religion, when the two of them are in the same class. But you can inculcate into a Muslim child that other religions are of the devil when the child is alone with you. This is the genesis of religious conflict in Nigeria.

Until our educational planners come to terms with the fact that the school and not the church and the mosque is the sole place where religious co-existence can be imbibed by our youths, the Boko Haram issue will continue to hunt us. When the University of San Francisco organized a symposium on "Globalization and its Discontents: Modernization, Culture and Religion" it was clear that they had come to terms with the importance of religion in social re-engineering. As stated above, its aim was to "offer a comprehensive framework for addressing prospects for the peaceful evolution of people and societies in the third millennium" (<http://www.ji3.org/symposuim2007-html>).

The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) writing in their website <http://nirecng.org/history.html> traced the history of the organization as follows:

The Nigeria Inter-Religious Council, (NIREC) is a voluntary association made up of fifty (50) members, (25 Christians and 25 Muslims) formed by the representatives of the two Principal Religions - that is, Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, on the 11th day of September, 1999. Supported and encouraged by President Olusegun Obasanjo, who saw the body as a wonderful project emanating from the leadership of both major faiths, NIREC was inaugurated on the 29th day of September, 1999.

It continued:

The establishment of NIREC as a Council was occasioned by the incessant ethno-religious crises which punctuated the socio-political landscape of Nigeria as a Country. NIREC, also known as the Council, is a permanent and an independent body established to provide religious leaders and traditional rulers with a variable forum to promote greater interaction and understanding among the leadership and their followers as well as lay foundations for sustainable peace and religious harmony in Nigeria.

When Prof. Yusuf A. Obaje, the Chaplain in Aso Rock Chapel, initiated and established NIREC in 1999, it was with a view to stemming the tide of religious intolerance. The question is: fourteen years down the line, has NIREC really succeeded in averting religious violence in Nigeria. The answer is NO! This is because we have placed the cart before the horse. Instead of bringing the young children together for religious instructions in primary and secondary schools, we are bringing together adults, who themselves are part of the violence, to dialogue together. For religious intolerance to be nipped in the bud, it must begin from the primary and secondary schools. Christian and Muslim children must be brought together under one umbrella and taught the ethics of both religions.

Conclusion

Thomas Aquinas wrote: "the greater the charity from which our actions proceed the more perfectly shall we enjoy God" (Aquinas, 1952: 1-1 q95). Rousseau is of the opinion that "wherever men love their country... and live simply, little remains to be done in order to make them happy" (Rousseau, 1952:377b). When

the principles of religion are properly harnessed, it will lead not only to the moral emancipation of the society but to peace co-existence of its citizens. It is in line with this observation that the following recommendations are made as way forward in handling issues concerning homeland security in Nigeria.

1. Religious principles should be applied in running the affairs of this country. Secularism has failed the western nations, and it is failing Nigeria. Ejenobo (2011) writes: "The rulers of this nation do not fear God, else they will know that you cannot come to man's house and take his property without his permission. The Multi-National Oil companies do not have the fear of God else they will not come to a man's house and steal his property to develop another man's land, thus robbing Peter to pay Paul."
2. Bishop Mike Okonkwo, Presiding Bishop of The Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM) in an interview published in the Daily Independent Newspaper of Monday June 15, 2009 on page B8, made a very strong case for Christians to get involved in partisan politics. It is time for Nigeria to have God fearing men running the affairs of this country, from the President to the National Assembly down to State Governors and State Houses of Assemblies and Local Government Chairmen. These are the places where policy decisions are taken. With the right people in these places who have the interests of the masses at heart, the insecurity challenges in the Niger Delta will disappear.
3. Confessional religious education should be re-introduced into the educational policy of Nigeria. Children of all faiths (Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion) should be taught under one roof the ethical principles of this religion. This will make adherents of all the major religions in Nigeria to know the ethical teachings of other religions and learn how to respect them.
4. In place of the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council, a Ministry of Religious Affairs should be established at all the tiers of government in Nigeria (Federal, State and Local Government Council). With a Minister or Commissioner of Religious Affairs, religious dialogue will be on the front burner of socio-political discuss. Currently it is treated as an addendum to governance, and no properly budgetry provisions are made for religious matters. Pilgrimages is not the only religious matter that the government should handle. Just as NIREC brings together religious leaders of both

divide, the Ministry of Religious affairs will ensure regular dialogue among these religious leaders.

5. All religious organizations should be registered with the Government. While most Christian religious organizations, including churches and ministries, register with the government, the same cannot be said of Muslim religious organizations. This is why it has been difficult for the Government to locate the leaders of Boko Haram. If it had been registered with the Federal Government and its aims and objectives known from inception, the country would not have been thrown into its present state of insecurity.

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