

Sustaining the Faith and Mission of Christianity in the Face of Terrorism in Nigeria

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Abstract

This work sustaining the faith and mission of Christianity in the face of terrorism in Nigeria, invites us to reflect on the need to rethink on the best measures needed to preserve this faith handed over to us by the missionaries that has lingered for decades. Faith is the basis for our gathering, believe and following the foot step of Jesus Christ as Christians. The fear that Christianity may cease to exist in Nigeria if terrorism persist should worry every right-thinking Nigerian. Considering the impact of Christianity in Nigeria, it should be an institution that should be protected and preserved. Since the rise of terrorism, the country has not remained the same. The study used theological, biblical and ethnographical methods to understand the context and how much terrorism has affected the Christian faith and mission in Nigeria and how we can respond to this attack using the apostolic models in Acts of the Apostles. The study revealed that Christianity has been under attack by different kinds of terrorist ranging from herdsmen, bandits and kidnappers who attacked innocent people especially those living in the rural areas with sophisticated weapons, leaving many dead including pastors and church members even on worship days such as Sundays. This study will therefore, hopefully, contribute towards the enlightenment of the Christians faith.

Key words: Faith, Mission, Christianity, Terrorism and Nigeria

Introduction

The mass killings in Nigeria coupled with the high level of insecurity since the invasion of terrorism in the different parts of the country is the motivation for this work. Over the years, terrorist attacks have persisted in Nigeria under various groups and forms, such as the herdsmen, banditry, kidnapping, Boko Haram, etc. The killings of farmers, innocent people and destruction of life and properties are the ban of the day. This has been like this for many decades now. According to Austin Okafor, there is much insinuation that these terroristic acts are strongly motivated by politics and the quest for religious domination. Christianity has been a religion in Nigeria for many decades. This experience has in no small measure threatened the faith of the people of God; hence the fear that Christianity may cease to exist if the tension of terrorism heightens is apparent. With a particular reference to a state in Nigeria that has mostly suffered terrorism. We shall use Benue State as a case study. As one among the middle belt State in the North central part of Nigeria, Benue state has over the years suffered a lot of killings of the human person by the terrorist. This crisis has actually caused the death of two Catholic priests recently along with many lay faithful while they were at Mass and some in their farms and at home. The general perception is that, the herdsmen are terrorists by the way they operate. The people no longer feel safe in their land such that they may have left their home lands to live in the internally displaced camps IDPs or live with relations in other places.

Conceptual clarifications of terms:

Faith: According to Agada, Basil, in the context of religion, one can define faith as "belief in God or in the doctrines or teachings of religion". Religious people often think of faith as ... for Nwachukwu 2000, faith is the inner attitude, conviction, or trust relating human beings to a supreme God or ultimate salvation. In religious traditions stressing divine grace, it is the inner certainty or attitude of love granted by God himself. In Christian theology, faith is the divinely inspired human response to God's historical revelation through Jesus Christ and, consequently, is of crucial significance. According to C. S. Lewis Faith is holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods. It takes faith for me to believe that men walked on the moon in 1969. I am convinced that it happened, but it doesn't *seem* true to me. It doesn't seem plausible that 1960's technology could have accomplished this, even though I know that it did. Faith is the foundation and essence of the movement of Christianity in the world and in Nigeria. Jesus Christ raised a sobering question to His disciples. According to Saint John Paul II, Faith "is the lifelong companion that makes it possible to perceive, ever anew, the marvels that God works for us.

Christianity: according to Balogun, Benjamin, Christianity is a monotheistic and Abrahamic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ as presented in canonical gospels and other New Testament writings as well as the Old Testament. Consequentially, Christians commonly refer to Jesus as Christ or Messiah. For Daniel 2010, Christianity is the major religion stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ, or the Anointed One of God) in the 1st century CE. It has become the largest of the world's religions and, geographically, the most widely diffused of all faiths. It has a constituency of

more than two billion believers. Its largest groups are the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and the Protestant churches.

Mission: According to Denis, Johnson, the word mission (Latin: *missio*), as a translation of the Greek *Apostolē*, “a sending,” appears only once in the English New Testament (Galatians 2:8). An apostle (*Apostolos*) is one commissioned and sent to fulfill a special purpose. According to James 1999, a Christian mission is an organized effort to spread Christianity to new converts. Missions involve sending individuals and groups across boundaries, most commonly geographical boundaries, to carry on evangelism or other activities, such as educational or hospital work.

Terrorism: According to Fortunatus, Nwachukwu, the term "terrorism" comes from French *terrorisme*, from Latin: *terror*, "great fear", "dread", related to the Latin verb *terrere*, "to frighten". The *terror cimbricus* was a panic and state of emergency in Rome in response to the approach of warriors of the Cimbri tribe in 105 BCE. The French National Convention declared in September 1793 that "terror is the order of the day". The period 1793–94 is referred to as *La Terreur* (Reign of Terror). According to Myra Williamson (2009) "The meaning of "terrorism" has undergone a transformation. During the reign of terror, a regime or system of terrorism was used as an instrument of governance, wielded by a recently established revolutionary state against the enemies of the people. Now the term "terrorism" is commonly used to describe terrorist acts committed by *non-state or sub-national entities* against a state".

Philosophical look at the contributions of Christianity in Nigeria

According to Okonkwo Solomon, the impact of Christianity on Nigeria society has persisted to this day. While it has brought undoubted benefits, it has also harmed the traditional way of life. The blessings which Christianity has brought to Nigeria are many. Apart from giving to the converts a new religious faith which they consider is superior to the traditional religions, the Christian missionaries did pioneer work in introducing new crafts, industries, Western education and modern health services. These contributions according to Okonkwo Solomon are analyzed below:

Belief in God: The Christian religion teaches the doctrine of one supreme God and is opposed to the worship of any other forms of deity. Its message was that of love and the universal brotherhood of mankind. In this respect the Christian religion therefore differed from the traditional religions of West Africa, which along with an acceptance of one Supreme Being worshipped a hierarchy of gods.

The Christian missionaries and vocational skills: He maintains further, without denying that prior to the introduction of Christianity in West Africa the people had developed their own crafts, one must admit that it was Christian missionaries who introduced modern forms of crafts such as carpentry and masonry. The early missionaries set up craft centres as part of their educational programmes. Also, the missionaries set up model farms where scientific agriculture was taught and new crops were introduced for the people, to go alongside longstanding indigenous production. A notable example, in Ghana, was the Methodist experimental farm near Cape Coast whose crops included cotton, coffee, black pepper, mango, ginger, cinnamon and olive trees.

Health services: According to Johnson, the missionaries also greatly improved the health services. For instance, in Nigeria, one of the first groups of missionaries to introduce organised medical services were the Roman Catholics. Father Jean Marie Coquard, operating in and from Abeokuta for forty years, was renowned among the Egba as a priest and surgeon in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1892, the Church Missionary Society opened the Iyi Enu Hospital in Onitsha which is today a leading hospital in Anambra state. In 1902 the Methodists opened a clinic at Igbo-Ora. Meanwhile, the Scottish missionary, Mary Slessor, had established a reputation in the Cross River area as a nurse. Through hard work and persuasion she succeeded in stopping the practice among the people of killing twins. Another important missionary doctor was J. R. Stephen who for many years headed a missionary hospital at Ilesha. As happened in other West African countries, many more mission-sponsored hospitals were founded in the course of the twentieth century.

Suppressed slave trade: Christian missions also took a leading role in the campaign to end the slave trade and to suppress slavery.

Education: Daniel 2010, perhaps the greatest service of the missionaries was the promotion of western *education* and the development of vernacular literature. Until almost the end of the colonial period education was still largely in the hands of the churches. It was only after the Second World War that the colonial governments started to show a real interest in the promotion of formal education in West Africa. Many who are in the political and several professional fronts today are products of missionary schools and education.

Effects of terrorism too Christianity in Nigeria

Down the centuries, as Azumah observes, Christians have had a polarized response to Islamic extremism Azumah 2010. While some Christians have opted for a tough response, others have preferred a soft or conciliatory tone. Broadly, Christian responses to Islam have changed over time, given that the medieval period was marked by a confrontational Christian anti-Islamic polemic, as opposed to the more conciliatory and open mechanisms of the contemporary period Kate 1997. In the wake of the spillover of Boko Haram insurgency into Nigeria, churches (Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal) have responded in various ways. The extremism came at a time when the north's religious landscape was already on the path to radicalism. In Nigeria, the current Islamic militancy has emerged as a determinant factor for Christian responses to Islam. This, as already noted, flows from the trauma of the Boko Haram attacks along with the huge psychological and evangelical impact on the Christian church. Initially, the operations of the Boko Haram sect were not given a serious attention by the Christian community. This flawed assumption caused the Christian clergy to do nothing to monitor the dynamics of the extremism or identifies early warning and signs. In 2013 and 2014, following the first abductions, the Christian faithful in the north came to understand that the sect was a huge threat to their faith. Such consciousness caused Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal church leaders to organize prayers calling on God to facilitate the release of the abducted clerics. The Nigeria National Episcopal Conference went beyond prayers by issuing a statement urging *Boko-Haram* to enter into dialogue with the Nigeria government for the release of Catholic clerics. Christians seem to have quickly understood that while *Boko-Haram* Islamist insurgents use Qur'anic verses calling for violence as a theological justification for their

terrorist acts, many orthodox Muslims do not agree with this way of interpreting the Qur'an. If one can go by messages from Catholic and Protestant clergy, it is evident that there is a consensus call for Christians to be careful on their judgments about the Qur'an. Christian leaders have not yielded to the temptation of telling Muslims how they should interpret the Qur'an and have avoided associating all Nigerian Muslims with the *Boko Haram* radical religious ideology.

Largely, the Christian community sees Islam as a religion with a potential to guarantee peace, in spite its use by *Boko Haram* leaders to justify the terror running its course in Nigeria's north. These messages have made Christians recognize that a majority of Muslims in Nigeria are not associated with ongoing militant Islam. Though under attack, Christians have not approved declarations that the insurgents fight and kill others in defence of Islam. Nigerian Muslims, with the exception of the minority extremists, totally reject the use of Qur'anic verses to justify violence in the name of Islam. On the humanitarian front, Nigerian churches are engaged in cross-border cooperation to address the refugee crisis triggered by the insurgency. In March 2015, the National Episcopal conferences of Nigeria and Nigeria entered a partnership intended to assist refugees in this camp. Since then, Catholic Church officials in Nigeria have been receiving and managing assistance from the National Episcopal Conference of Nigeria destined for Nigerians who have fled their homes for fear of this terrorist.

Regarding the spiritual domain, Christian leaders have offered prayers and invoked instructive Christian texts at critical moments whenever there was an attack. In July 2015 for instance, the Christian Churches nationwide held a Prayer for Peace Service across the country. The insecurity raging on our borders, in particular those with Nigeria, has created the problem of psychosis in our population. In these situations, you must put yourself in the hands of the Almighty God, who alone can preserve us from harm and danger. Christian leaders also responded to Boko-Haram terrorist activities by initiating interfaith dialogue and collaborative engagement between Christians and Muslims. They did so, fearing that northern Nigeria would otherwise be exposed to sectarian violence. Christian leaders initially intended to break the cycle of revenge by preaching the gospel of forgiveness. Spiritual support was provided to the affected Christians.

Sustaining the Christian Mission using the Acts of the Apostles chapter 4:32-38 Model

In Acts 4:32-37 the bible states that:

And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul neither did anyone say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but all things were common unto them. And with great power did the apostles give testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ our lord and great grace was in them all. For neither was there anyone needy among them for as many as were, Owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the price of the things they sold. And laid it down before the feet of the apostles; and distribution was made to everyone according as he had need. And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, by interpretation. The son of consolation,) a Levite a Cyprian born, having land, sold it and brought the price and laid it at the feet of the apostles. Act 4:32-35

Many Christians are caught up in the web of individualism, hedonism, consumerism and materialism that dominates so many of our prosperous societies today. We Christians are sometimes accused of being socialists or even Marxists and Communists. It is an accusation we should be ashamed of. For Fred Justin, biblical analytical view, there was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Indeed, the social structure of the early Church was one of a common support, with the biggest burden being on those who were well-off. From that common treasury anyone in need was supported, even foreigners living in the land. This, of course, should come as no surprise considering Christ's teachings on money and possessions. In God's kingdom we are not owners of possessions, because all things belong to and come from the Lord. Rather, we are stewards of God's possessions and we are expected to be steward with grace and mercy to those in need. We are one body in Christ and no single part is superior to the other. The description emphasizes the communal ownership and mutual responsibility of the community members for each other. For Justin, Four elements are mentioned in the first sentence: The believers form a community; they are of one heart and mind, deeply united with each other; no one claimed anything as belonging to themselves; everything was held in common; they gave witness to the central element of their faith the Risen Jesus with great power, through signs and healings. There were no rich or poor in this community. "Those who owned lands or houses sold them." It is important to note that this was possible because "the community of believers were of one heart and one mind". Their material sharing was simply an expression of the care which they felt for each other at a much deeper level. The passage concludes with a striking example. Joseph, also known as Barnabas ("son of encouragement"), sold property he had and put the proceeds at the feet of the apostles. He was a Levite from Cyprus. (Jews had been living there since the time of Maccabees.) Generally, Levites did not own inherited land in Palestine but the rule may not have applied in other areas. Or the property may have belonged to his wife. Barnabas, will later become a missionary partner with Paul. Barnabas' action will contrast with another couple, Ananias and Sapphira, who claimed to be doing the same but who in fact only gave part of their possessions and kept the rest for themselves. They were severely punished.

One after the other, they both dropped dead. Do we find such sharing communities in our Church today? Okafor Peter counsel, perhaps today we could reflect on our own attitudes to material goods: how we acquire them, how we use them, to what extent we share our material blessings with those in genuine need and not just out of our surplus. This is something we need to reflect on as individuals, as families, and as a Church. According to Callan's commentary, these verses show the great unity of thought, affection, and purpose which reigned among the disciples. Christ had prayed (John 17:11) for this beautiful unity among His faithful followers. All things were possessed in common, as now in religious communities, so that those who had been poor now shared the possessions of the rich. It is not likely, however, that each of the faithful gave up all that he possessed, but only in so far as was necessary to assist his needy brethren. The early Christians who came from different family and cultural background have an outstanding life style that is for our admonition today. Nwankwo Amos says that they are the golden personality of the gospel and works of Jesus. For their sacrifices and tireless work brought us to where we are today (p6) There can be no exploit and foundation to stand upon in

the name of Jesus if these men and women did not lay down their material goods and even their lives for the sake of Christ. Great power no doubt must follow a sincere gathering of the people of God, who gather in the name of Jesus just like the apostles as of old. There can be no needy as well in the midst of where people are charitable to their gift and talents in the service of God and one another. The issue of being in need is responsible for the low turnout of many Christians in our Churches today. But if we can learn the example of the apostle who in their poverty and distress still opt to give and care for themselves in their community, there will be a long impact in the sustenance of faith amongst the people of God.

They have so much that they even shared to other converts who saw the way they lived and opt to join them in professing Christianity. These men and women sold their valuables for the just cause of the kingdom of God. The people of Nigeria, especially the Catholic faithful needs virtue as this in their moments of persecution and faith crisis. We cannot continue to hold unto all the material possession of this world to ourselves and expect the people of God in need to be carried along side with us in the journey of faith. If we must sustain the faith, we must then learn the act of giving until it hurts as Mother Teresa of Calcutta will put it love until it hurts. The Apostles are perfect example of the beginning and the restoration of the church in any situation especially in times like this. There are volumes of symbols and representations of what they thought us in their words and deeds. Peter Nwachukwu posits that only in love for our brother and sisters are we truly known and are called Christians. John Obi, the early Christians were never known to each other. They came just by following the steps and teaching of Christ, in fact they were called Christians because they lived like Jesus. The same experience should be ours today. What a man or woman in the face of this crisis deserved is tender loving care having their needs provided unconditionally?

Evaluation

The idea of this work is to strengthen and sustain the value and virtue of Christian faith that exist amongst us and that was handed over to us by divine providence and human effort via the missionaries. It is obvious to see how much the Nigeria State and the Christian faithful have suffered persecution in the last few years. Many souls have been killed, properties worth millions of naira destroyed in the face of terrorist attack who invade the State at will and get away with their crimes unchallenged at every corner they attacked almost on daily basis. Hence, the call for the sustenance of the faith becomes a necessary experience especially in times like this that the fear of gathering for worship has caged many.

So many churches are gradually going into extinction and their place of worship becoming a ghost territory. The government of the day has been fingered to be abating terrorism due to their ineptitude and weak response towards confronting the terrorist using the nation's military might and sophisticated equipment. In Nigeria of today it is the opposite. The government rather creates an amnesty programme for the terrorist. Rather than kill the terrorist for the destruction and destabilization they are causing in the nation they are pardoned and given scholarship to go for training in oversea. As it stands the church is helpless and defenseless due to our religious differences and no sense of nationalization amongst us.

Conclusion

Christianity in Nigeria of today is no doubt in a State of chaos and suffers continuous persecution in the hands of terrorist groups in Nigeria State. No doubt the Church of Nigeria is going through trying times which is threatening the faith and peace of practicing Christianity in a country as this. The way and manner the faith is being attacked by terrorist, there is therefore the need to look inward in our faith as believers and followers of Jesus Christ. This is in securing the faith from going to extinction as a result of this alien and life consuming situation bedeviling the State. Thus, the life of the apostles in Acts 4:32-37 as Stated in this work is a panacea for responding to these challenging times that is both life and materially consuming. If the people of God will yield to the life and character of the early Church fathers, there is that assurance that the wounded will be healed and those with broken bones will be mended and the Church will still move on amidst these troubles.

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