CHURCH RESPONSE TO SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

A progressive and developed nation is measured by its level of security of lives and property of its people as well as attitude to peaceful co-existence among its citizens. In other words, security is the mother of invention and national development. This is because without security, there can hardly be any room for meaningful development and national integration. Several attempts have been channeled on the role of security apparatus with little or no attention giving to Church response to security challenges facing the Nigerian society. The consensus among Nigerians is that insecurity is the biggest threat to everyone. In many parts of the country, people are reported killed, maimed and raped on daily basis. Kidnapping has become a lucrative business in which ransoms running to several billions of naira are being demanded. The emergence of Boko Haram, banditry, and herdsmen altered the already battered image of the country in the comity of nations as one of the countries to abstain from. In similar vein, the near collapse of security architectures in Nigeria has created a Hobbesian state of nature where life is poor, nasty, brutish and short. As a result of this, the intention of this work is to examine the response of the Church to security challenges in Nigeria and how the Church can help the populace in building security consciousness in the Nigerian society. The method adopted was historical. This became imperative so as to be able to trace the genesis of insecurity issues in Nigerian society. The study discovered that no nation can develop where lives and properties are constantly under threat. The paper also recommended that church leaders should use their pulpits to promote awareness among members of the Church on the need for security of their lives and loved ones and the society at large. They should be bold enough to speak out about the ills in governance for peace and national security to be achieved.

Keywords: Church, security, insecurity, national, development and Nigeria.

Introduction

In the past few decades, insecurity has become a cog in the wheel of progress to Nigerian society. In fact, insecurity has become a cog in the wheel of national development at all spheres of human endeavours. It is needless to state that its scourge has assumed a formidable and dangerous dimension and its devastating effects know no bound. It has, therefore, continued to result, among others to loss of lives, wanton destruction of properties worth billions of naira, destruction of investments and untold hardship coupled with absence of safety in all nooks and crannies of the country. Boko Haram insurgency, Banditry, Herdsmen and kidnapping have continued to pose serious threats to Nigeria's security system and corporate entity (Zenk 7). With the emergence of these deadly groups, attacks and suicide bombing carried out by them have continued to increase beyond the national boundary. It is, therefore, unfortunate to say the least that the situation is getting worse in view of the increase in the number of violent crimes like ritual killings, religious crises, politically-motivated killings and violence. According to Obiogeli (22), these incidents have, sadly, increasingly become the regular signature that characterizes life in Nigeria since 2009.

The continued state of insecurity is a threat to the existence of Nigeria as a nation and people. It has also become a threat to the fabric of national integration in the country. It has succeeded in creating an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, disquiet and mutual distrust among the ethnic groups in Nigeria (Jegede 69). The ever increasing insecurity challenge in Nigeria has resulted to loss of human lives which cannot be equated with any other forms of loss. The herdsmen and farmers' clashes, amongst many other conflicts situations in the country, have led to the decimation of many lives since independence till date. Onwumere (10) quoted the number of deaths as at 2014 resulting from the herders and farmers' clashes as officially recorded by Institutefor Economic and Peace as 1,229. This figure pales into insignificance when compared with the most recent killings witnessed in Benue State. This most recent Benue State experience, for example, recorded over 70 lives lost in one single attack of a community (Gadzama 15). No doubt, many individuals have been affected in several ways, such as, loss of bread winners, children became orphaned, women widows, while not forgetting the emotional and psychological effects of these challengeson them.

Owing to these security challenges, the Nigerian government, on its part, has also taken different policy measures to combat insecurity and insurgency. The military, through the command of Operation Lafiya Dole, has undertaken a series of actions aimed at defeating Boko Haram and other militia groups in the country. The creation of the 7th Division of the Army headquarters in Maiduguri, the use of air power through a series of operations called *Ruwan Wuta* (Rain of Fire) has also been an important aspect of combating insecurity (Adetuberu 185). Despite these efforts by the government, the security situation in Nigeria keeps deteriorating on daily basis. In fact, the crises between herders and farmers in Nigeria have been rated six times deadlier than Boko Haram insurgency. The recent abductions of students in Katsina, Niger and Kaduna States are few examples of the deplorable state of security in the country (Onu 87). At this juncture, one wonders if there are roles the Church should be playing in combating insecurity or has the Churchfailed Nigeria in performing her duty of speaking out on the ills of

governance. The Church should be an example in guiding and helping the Nigerian government to shape the society in whatever capacities. The General Superintendent (GS) of Deeper Christian Life Ministry (DLCM), Williams Kumuyi, reiterated the roles the Church can play in solving security challenges in the country. According to him,

> Many people do not understand what the Church can offer when we talk of insecurity…the Church is not just for religion. If we look up to God and look up through the people He has raised up to bring solutions to our problems, the Lord will give directions and solve everything (22).

For a better understanding of this paper certain terms need clarification. The word "church" conveys different meanings and is therefore subject to many usages. Afolabi (4) simply refers to it as a "building for Christian gathering or worship." It also connotes an assembly or a universal community of the body of Christ (Dairo 89). However, the word "church" in the Bible comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* which means a "called out company or assembly" (Jegede 91). First, as the body of Christ, the Church is often defined as a "local assembly or group of believers" (1 Cor. 1:2; 11 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1-2). Secondly, it is defined as the "body of individual living believers (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal.1:13). Finally, it is defined as the universal group of all people who have trusted Christ through the ages (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 5:23-27) (Williams 20). Similarly, the term can be approached in diverse ways. Yet, no matter the divergence views, the word "security" is the antithesis of "insecurity." The concept of security is carefully examined so as to facilitate a good understanding of "insecurity." Security is the embodiment of the mechanism put in placeto avoid, prevent reduce or resolve violent conflicts and threats that originate from other states, non-state actors or structural socio-political and economy condition (Stan 4).Advanced English Dictionary (2314) defines insecurity as a state of not being confident about oneself or your relationships with other people or the act of not being safe or protected.The above definition further explains the meaning of the term to include not just the general meaning but the condition of inadequacy and uncertainty. In the context of this work, insecurity is defined as a beach of peace and security whether historical, religious, ethnic-regional civil, social, economic and political that contributes to recurring conflicts and leads to wanton destruction of lives and property (Jegede 103).

Security Challenges in Nigeria

On the lips of many Nigerian citizens and visitors to the country in recent time is the alarming rate of insecurity. This has affected all strata of the society; it has alsomade peaceful co-existence, national progress and development an impossible task (Abdulkadir 33). The security challenges facing Nigeria today includes but not limited to ethno-religious intolerance, poverty, Boko-Haram insurgence, banditry, herdsmen attacks, kidnapping among other related challenges. These challenges underscore the position of Defense Chief, General Abayomi Olonishakin, when he submitted in 2017 that the military is battling at least fourteen challenges across the country and this unpleasant situation indicates that the country "is effectively permanently in a state of emergence (56)." As at 2019, the military units were deployed in 28 of the 36 states owing to internal insecurity challenges. Many officers overstayed at their duty posts for many months as a result of lack of man power.

The maintenance of law and order in Nigeria became very challenging coupled with the fact that the available military personnel could only make do with obsolete weapons to fight bandits and insurgents who operate with sophisticated weapons.

Suffice it to say that the feeling of insecurity could be traced to the period of independence (1960-1970). At independence, the colonial government imposed a federal structure of government. Achumba (31), while quoting Wheare defined federalism as a constitutional division of power between two levels of government that are independent and coordinated in their respective spheres of influence. Unfortunately, the federal structure handed over to Nigeria at independence was not in conformity to Wheare's concept of a federal state. To this extent, the arrangement has often led to conflicts among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria whenever any part of the country feels threatenedand cheated in socio-political arrangement. This has given rise to clamour and agitation for a true federating State, restructuring and the minority agitation after independence has been on the increase. These agitations, have no doubt, contributed to insecurity challenges being witnessed in all parts of the country, as seen in the activities of IPOB, Boko-Haram, Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra, agitation for Yoruba nation (Oodua Republic) and a few others (Gambari 21).

It is also pertinent to mention that security challenges in the North Central of Nigeria are on the rise. It has resulted in serious humanitarian tragedy in terms of loss of lives and property. The violent conflict of Plateau State, for example, has taken a worrisome and disturbing dimension as more than 4,000 and 7,000 persons have been killed since late 2001 in the outbreak in Jos (Sule 15). International Crisis Group (ICG) (18) reported that from September 2017 to June, 2018, many more were wounded and about 300,000 displaced; an estimated 176,000 in Benue State, about 100,000 in Nasarawa State, over 100,000 in Plateau State, about 19,000 in Taraba State and an unknown number in Adamawa State. In the same vein, it was reported by Olaniyi (32) etal, that Fulani herdsmen had killed 32 people in communities in Dekina and Omala Local Government Areas of Kogi State. They wore military uniform and wielded AK47, numbering over 500; they burnt over 20 houses, killed anyone in sight and shot at those who tried to escape into the bushes (28). Similarly, the Daily Trust (56) reported that gun men had killed no fewer than 19 people in Tawari community in the Kogi Local Government Area, burning down buildings, including the palace of the king of thecommunity. It was also a gory sight as heavily equipped dastardly-armed robbery gang stormed the Offa city on the 5th of April, 2018 and robbed 4 Commercial Banks in Kwara State, living 33 people dead.

The wave and fear of security challenges in Nigeria are increasing on daily basis. This has been compounded also by the rising activities of terrorism since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999. More so, what the current trend of violence is imprinting on the psyche of an average Nigerian is that the government security apparatus is incapable of arresting the situation and guaranteeing the safety and security of its citizenry. This inability can be attributed to lack of insufficient fund, personnel and sophisticated weapons. This would therefore impact on the several human security as the situation promotes fear while also limiting the people's ability to develop economically. The nation's capacity to attract foreign

investors would also be impaired as a potential investors that would earn Nigeria good revenue will avoid the countrylike a plague for fear of being attacked, kidnapped or killed.

Factors Responsible for Security Challenges in Nigeria

Every nook and cranny of the Nigerian society is witnessing problems posed by ever increasing rate of insecurity. Perhaps, if the government had been citizen-centered and provided good governance, irrespective of religion, regions, section and ethnicity, the problems associated with insecurity might have been well-handled and the threats they pose today would not have been in existence. Factors associated with insecurity include but not limited to; bad governance, religious differences and intolerance, unemployment, deception and insensitivity, tribalism or ethnicity, poverty, weak security system and shortage of security personnel.

(i.) Religious Differences and Intolerance

Out of the aforementioned factors, religious intolerance is, perhaps arguably, the fundamental problem taking the front burner in Nigeria today. It is seen as the driving current, sparking other factors of insecurity into action. Religious intolerance in Nigeria is a foreign missionaries' legacy. The emergence of the two missionary religions (Islam and Christianity) ushered in intolerance and antagonism into the socio-religious landscape of the various communities that constitute Nigerian State (Atoi 46). Religious intolerance in Nigeria occurs both at inter and intra faith levels, that is, between one religious tradition and another and between sects or denominations within the same religion.The Sharia conundrum has generated a lot of religious intolerance in Nigeria since the topic was first raised in the Constituent Assembly of 1978. The newest form of religious intolerance is the activities of Boko Haram Islamic Fundamentalist Sect that is presently threatening the corporate existence of the country.In the words of Onuoha (54), the group seeks political and religious reforms within the country, more especially the adoption of Sharia Law. It is pertinent to state that the Constitution of Nigeria, especially section 10 of the 1999 Constitution prohibits the adoption of religion as state religion. Section 38 equally states that every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, political affiliation and religion. Therefore, religious laws like Sharia are not compatible with civil laws and it cannot override the Constitution.

To a large extent, one can say that Nigeria of the past boasted of religious flexibility and tolerance for many years. However, in recent time, it seems to have been shelved as gruesome stories relating to religion rearing their ugly heads frequently, causing loss of lives. One can equally submit that a curious feature of today's Nigerian society is religious intolerance most especially in the Northern and Middle Belt regions of the country. Religious intolerance usually originates from the perceived superiority of one religion over the others. In single terms, religious intolerance or fanaticism is the inability of an adherent of a particular religion to acknowledge, accommodate and accept the right of others to live by another faith different from his own. Nigeria as a secular country is governed by her Constitution. Section 38(1) of the 1999 Amended Constitution states that, "every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion…" It is rather unfortunate religious intolerance poses a great threat to the implementation of this law.

(ii.) Bad Governance

Good governance is the foundation upon which a strong economy and sustainable security are built. Unfortunately, the idea of good governance has eluded the nation. In the opinion of Cesare (21), it is clear that certain crimes are committed as a means of protest against bad governance and leadership.The major problem to development in all facets of life in Nigeria is leadership. Where leaders are not forthright in making productive policies that will contribute meaningfully to the life of her citizens, the end-result will be agitations and escalation of crimes as it is been witnessed in the country. To a large extent, the root cause of the prevalent violent clashes in Nigeria could be attributed to bad governance of the political elite and their collaborators. For instance, in the Niger Delta, the "milking" of the area without a corresponding care for the poor people led to complaints, revolting and rebellion against the government. During that time, there were instances where their farmlands and rivers (their sources of livelihood) were irreparably damaged by oil spillage arising from exploitation, yet, nobody listened nor compensated them by providing alternative sources of survival, provision of health care, schools, infrastructures among many others. Groups like Niger Delta Vigilante, Niger Delta Frontier Force, Egbesu are of the view that since he Nigerian government is not ready to listen and engage them, perhaps, violent expression of their grievances may be the best option (Akintokunto 28). Although this lackadaisical attitude is not peculiar to Nigeria alone but virtually all African leaders are guilty of subverting the expectations of their citizens.

Bad governance has immensely succeeded in delaying the developmental process and weakening security policies in Nigeria. The political as well as socio-economic well-beings of the citizens are often-time compromised by the ruling class who sing songs of changes that end up in their pockets and that of their cronies (Sheriff 11). Thus, bad governance in every arm and tier of government flourishes like business in the country and this has continued to create a high level of insecurity situation facing the country today.

(iii.)High Rate of Unemployment

One of the major reasons for security challenges in Nigeria is the high rate of unemployment. The unemployment rate saw no significant changes in 2021 in comparison to 2020 and remained at around 9.79%. Unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 33.30% in the fourth quarter of 2020. At 33% current level, Nigeria's jobless rate is the second-highest on Global List, as more than half of its labour force is unemployed or underemployed (NBS 4). There are millions of individuals, both young and old, graduates and undergraduates that are willing to work but they are being forced to be idle owing to the fact that they cannot secure paying jobs. As a result of idleness, the unemployed youths become easy targets of recruitment by the terrorists who are ready to entice them financially (Ononoghu 134). They become social menace, perpetrating evil acts in the society. It is also possible that many of them who have joined the various insurgence groups would not have done so if they were gainfully employed. Therefore, the rise in crime rates in Nigeria is a direct result of unemployment.

(iv.) Deception and Insensitivity

In the words of Ogunkunle (93), the security upheaval in Nigeria today is the product of deception and insensitivity on the part of the elites. He is of the view that the agitation that arose from implementation of Sharia Law especially in the northern region around 1999 was mainly to cause political tension and heat up the polity. The administration of former president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was fully aware of the dastard operations of Boko Haram in the northern Nigeria yet nothing serious was done to curtail their activities. Thus, on the part of the government is a sign of deception and insensitivity. Even, the political class and opinion leaders from the north seem to be pretending that they do not know the groups that are involved in the barbaric acts of killing innocent lives and destroying valuable properties (96). This act of deception and insincerity has made Nigerians to realize the unreadiness and unwillingness of the government to take the bull by the horns. Hence, their deceptiveness has only heightened the high level of insecurity in the Nigerian society.

(v.) Poverty

Poverty is an impediment to national progress and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria because it has succeeded in raising the level of insecurity. Poverty, according to Odoma (202) is the "greatest of man's known enemies as it has sent many to their early graves, left many malnourished while others perpetually remain in hopelessness and misery." It is on record that over 69.7% of Nigerians are wallowing in abject poverty. Over 80 million Nigerians, based on the 120 million population estimate, survive on less than $1 per day (Punch 16). While connecting religious violence and security challenges to poverty, the editorial comment of the Nigerian Tribune of January 13th , 2010 says that, "since the 1980s, the condition of the average Nigerian has fallen to miserable level. Now, over 70% of the population lives below the poverty line."

As a rider to the above, one can see the effects of poverty on the nation in the words of Isiramen (334):

> Most family hardly finds 3 square meals in a day. Portable water is a scarce commodity, goods are not easy to come by, proper medical facilities have turned a mirage to most Nigerian citizens. Most citizens have lost hope for the next day. These groups of people can easily be lured into perpetrating violent against others. Young people are known to be paid small amounts of money and promised heavenly rewards if they participate in religious violence.
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> Judging from the above, the high level of poverty in Nigeria is a threat to national security as there are many young people on the streets who are ready and available to do anything to survive in a society that seems not to care for their wellbeing.

(vi.) Weak Security System and Shortage of Security

This is particularly the case within the Nigerian Police agency who are responsible for internal security maintenance of law and order. The weakness of these security agencies could be attributed to inadequate funding, lack of modern equipment to meet up with a global standard, lack of personnel training, poor welfare (which often made them to compromise), as well as shortage of personnel. Olanisakin (44) submitted that the ratio of police population in Nigeria is 1:450. According to

him, this ratio falls below the United Nation standard. By implication, Nigeria is grossly policed and this explains the inability and continuous failure of the Nigerian Police to effectively nip insecurity and other criminal activities in the bud. Their failure, has therefore contributed to the birth of many criminal activities leading to insecurity in Nigerian nation.

Church Response to Security Challenges in Nigeria

Since the nation is made up of multi-religious adherents, it therefore means that the religious leaders cannot be left behind in finding lasting solutions to the numerous security challenges facing the country. This section sheds light into what the Church is doing in combating security challenges in Nigeria in order to maintain peace and improve the already bad security system in the country.

The incessant stories on security challenges in Nigeria, more especially in the northern part is a case of a people faced with tyranny, banditry and insurgency. The people have continually cried for a leader who will stand and speak their minds in defense of peace, truth and justice. Since the hostility started, the prime targets of these attacks have been the Christians and the Church. However, it can be argued that Boko Haram and other militia groups' activities in Nigeria in the recent past have known no religious boundary, as both Christians and Muslims have been on the receiving end of their attacks.

In response to insecurity in Nigeria, the Church has designed several plans aimed at curtailing the attacks on churches in particular and the society in general. In diagnosing the remote and immediate causes of the attack on the Church and the society, many have suggested that the Church should stand-up in defense of themselves while others highlighted the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in the restoration of peace and healing of affected communities. In the attempt to curb the growing rate of killings in the north owing to its ethno-religious nature, the General Overseer of Living Water Unlimited, Rev. Ladi Thompson (10) opined that both legal and scriptural approaches should be adopted in response to insurgency in Nigeria. He noted that at the initial stage, many Nigerians did not consider the group as a terrorist organization.At that time, Nigerians did not fully understand what the Boko Haram fully stood for (12).

While reacting on what the Church should do, Bishop Anietie Etukudo of the Living-Proof Bible Church, Ogba, Lagos State, submitted that the Church must not fail to call the attention of the government whenever its notices any misgiving in the society (34). According to him, the Churchis well represented by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Hence, CAN's position on insecurity stands. He further opined that since the believers' weapon of welfare is prayer, the Church must not cease in praying for the nation and its leadership and should not in anyway support violence. He Church is also expected to speak out and hold the government accountable for the citizenry. In the opinion of Sola Idowu, a Baptist pastor with the Ajayi Dahunsi Memorial Church, Lagos State, he stated that it is important that the Church rise to the occasion by responding appropriately to the ever-growing monster of insecurity in the country (12). According to him, it is unfortunate that Nigeria is today basically defined by insecurity occasioned by the activities of the insurgent. Idowu (17), therefore concluded that the Church must get informed, educate members on the issues of security, avoid retaliation if

attacked, engage the government for lasting solutions and then look unto God, urging Christians to pray for divine intervention to keep and deliver the Church and the Nigerian societies from dangers.

Recommendations

The work recommended among other things that:

1. The Church must teach biblical truth and ensure that the rights of the citizens which include freedom to worship and associate are protected.
2. The security agencies in Nigeria must be well equipped, constantly trained, sufficiently funded and adequately motivated for better performance.
3. Church leaders can also help to reduce security challenges by cautioning their followers against disobeying the laws of the land and taking the laws into their hands.
4. The Nigerian government should intensify more efforts in its quest towards ensuring the security of its citizens. It is expected of them, where necessary, to recruit more security personnel to complement the efforts of the over-burdened personnel. This should be based on competence rather than meritocracy.
5. The community can also help law enforcement agencies to identify challenges, issues and concerns that might emerge within or outside the community. Once the community is involved in the security matters, it will help reduce the growing rate of crimes in their neighbourhood.

Conclusion

No nation can survive where there are internal upheavals that continue to threaten national security, peaceful coexistence, religious harmony, as well as socio-economic developments. In the time past, Nigeria was a peaceful country but recently, the high rate of insecurity has made the country a laughing stock in the comity of nations. This is particularly made possible owing to the collapse of the country's security apparatus. Insecurity and insurgency have affected the fabric of the nation making development in all spheres of human endeavour absolutely impossible. Its dastard acts have continued to have negative effects on human resources and national development. This has further heightened the level of poverty being witnessed across the country today. These perennial challenges could be attributed to the lackadaisical attitude of the ruling elites who are not willing to show enough commitment in discharging their traditional duties of tackling insecurity and insurgency within the Nigerian society.

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