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THE CULTURE AS A THREAT TO CHRISTIAN RELIGION IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

AMBROSE OBODOEZEOJIAKOR OGUECHE (PhD)
REV. FR. DR. WILLIAMS PETER AWOSHIRI
JOSEPH UMAR BIBINU (PhD in view)
HABILA KATUKA (PhD in view)
BENJAMIN SERGIUS (MA in view)
Faculty of Arts
Department of Christian Religious Studies
Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

Abstract

The focus of this work is on the cultural threat to Christianity in the Nigerian society. The Christian religion has witnessed serious persecution by the Boko Haran, and ISWAP terrorists. The attacks on the Christian community in the northern part of Nigeria especially northeast and northern are now a daily occurrence. The researchers made use of secondary sources of data collection as their methodology. This work found out the numerous attacks on innocent Christians are cause by envy greed among the perpetrators. Also the goes to dominate their environments as a result of their ignorance the work suggested that Christians should defend themselves so far government seems to be helpless. They should also remain prayerful and united against terrorists' attacks on them.

Keywords: Culture, Terrorism, Threat, Christianity, Nigerian Society.

Introduction

It is obvious that there are mixed feelings about the attacks on Christianity in Nigeria today. This ugly trend has different meanings attached to it. There are some few possible explanations on the social effects of terrorism as a threat to Christianity as a religion in Nigeria and globally; these include:

1. Vast amount of literature has been published on the social aspect of culture over the past years and decades, most of which it is challenging and been insufficient rigorous or too locally based to be useful as a general guide to the subject area.
2. This literature ranges from a narrow focus on individual effects on a specific target group to collectively effect at th6 National or even Global level, making it challenging to provide an overview that addresses the entire field.
3. A significant portion of this literature is couched in the underlying context of debates about the value of culture, this opens more doors as to what effect does culture has on Christianity as a religion and has become a global threat to Christianity.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Here, we shall define or describe some keywords found to be critical in the discourse. There are: effect, culture, threat, Christianity.

a. Effect - a distinctive impression that follows a thing in its fundamental presentation and wider range.
b. Culture - customary beliefs and the way of life with material and non-material traits of the people in a given society.
c. Threat - an expression of impression, to inflict injury pains and evil to someone.
d. Christianity - a religion derived from Christ as role model and figure.

FRAMEWORKS

This section examines several of the general frameworks that have been used to understand and analyze the social effects of' culture, they fall into four broad categories which frequently overlap:

- Holistic framework, examining the relationship between culture sustainability and Christianity as a religion.
- Framework that link culture to the concept of wellbeing and social cohesion.
- Frameworks that examine culture's role in promoting connectedness and participation.
- Framework that examines culture's role and unification and building a unique relationship while trying to reconnect each to where it belongs for easy identification and practice.
- Framework that place culture within a sustainability or human development context, are not just placed for fashion or decoration. Culture is place and consider in four different connections that are supplementary to each, which includes;

1. Social: that tends to how man relates to each other pf the given location of his choice.
2. Economic: it addresses the idea of how things are gotten and the process of managing it the best way for the surest way or sustainability within it framework.

The concept of wellbeing is somewhat related to the concept of sustainability but in the literature review, it relates to the social cohesion. The above factors arc the constitutes to what build culture and shape it with the idea of having a great impact within a given framework, because it involves the social life but overlaps with the cultural domain in the creation of identity and sense of place; and the economic domain in the area of education, knowledge and skills, place branding, contribution to the labour market and regional competitiveness.

The Sustainability of Culture

Life can be sustained with food, good health and fellowship in a close relationship and care of this life, so it is with the culture in the way of survival and sustainability. There ways that can help sustain culture which comes in different shapes they are the keys that can help a culture to survive. The following ways are stocked and glued to enhance a better culture which is framed as these fundamental networks.

1. Culture in a sustainable development-expands conventional sustainable development by adding culture as the fourth pillar alongside ecological social and economic consideration.
2. Culture for sustainable development sees culture as the overall foundation for sustainable development by recognizing that culture is at the root of all human decisions.

These concepts view culture as part of a holistic model that incorporates culture into a community overall wellbeing and long term sustainability are featured:

- culture vitality with the dimensions of environmental responsibility, economic health and social equity.
- wellbeing model includes cultural, environmental, social and economic dimensions in a holistic model of community wellbeing.
- medicine wheel model an original model that includes four segment or directions that can symbolize various interconnected aspects of life, for examples: North (environmental) South (social) West (economic) East (cultural); all these show the directions in which the force of culture is driven to in the sustainable order by creating and maintaining public spaces that draws -people together, building community identity and pride and using art and culture as a tool for regeneration and sustainability.

Yes, it is emphatically true that environment, social and economic aspects all face culture, because it deals with than wellbeing. The argument is very timely to be grasped for the implementation and execution, the isolation of each will affect man either directly or indirectly.

CULTURAL WELLBEING

This has to do with how culture affect every spheres of life in a given society, therefore it is believed that every activity is measured up of the value of culture and it is on the bases of cultural role in the following areas which includes;

a) Socialization: helping individual become integrated in social, political and economic order.
b) Qualifications: helping individual evaluates what is important in a giving society.
c) Subjectification: teaching people how to take a self-reliance independent autonomous and critical position within a social order, in doing so culture often introduces new ideas, new interpretation other ideas and new way of expression which is refer to as creativity as in art.

The three above refer to culture as an all-encompassing human practice with creative activities forming a sustainable part of it in a fast changing society.

CULTURE CONNECTION TO RELIGION

The relationship between culture and Christianity as a religion is a personal problem. H. Richard Niebuhr in his book "Christ and Culture", analyzed different ways in which this relationship has been conceived. His typology has five (5) conception of the relationship and is helpful to how Christianity has been appropriated in various cultural contexts, taking Africa as the main example.

1. Christ against culture: When Christianity is presented as an alternative to the existing culture the prospective convert may choose to either follow Christ or to remain in the evil world of paganism. This is a common misconception when Christianity is viewed, as an apocalyptic or sectarian movement and as Christendom. Before one convert the affection of the old culture is always there in memory.
2. The Christ of culture: On the opposite end of spectrum some Christians consider Christ as the son of God and son of Man who comes to affirmed the cultural religious heritage of people the gospel is the fulfillment of culture, example the Sermon on the

Mount (Matthew 5-7) exemplifies Christ as the Man for all culture, help people discern and live according to God's will in the context of their respective cultural and religious traditions. This Christianity cannot be culturally uniform. The churches of the apostolic period presuppose the relationship between Christ and culture, though Christian's and Hellenistic Christian churches were in communion with each other, each retained its unique cultural particularity.

3. Christ above culture: Is a way of avoiding the conflict between the two proceeding, making the distinction between the heavenly and the earthly cities. Augustine Says, "Christianity becomes transcendental, concentrating on salvation in Heaven and the future. In practice such religiosity and becomes irrelevant to the needs and demands of the present.
4. Christ and culture in paradox: This is another way of avoiding the conflict Christ both identified and contrasted with Culture. The church is in the world though not of the world, the view of the Protestant Reformation, especially Luther, the problem is lack of clarity regarding the circumstances under which Christ portrayed in support or against culture, who has the authority to decide? In the modern missionary enterprise this authority has been vested in missionaries who in turn were biased in favor of their own culture and against the culture where they were guests.

e) Christ the transformer of culture. This portrays Christ as making things new (Rev.21:5) conversion is viewed as a challenge for the concert to change their ways and become new beings; Paul's conversion is often cited as an example. He was transformed from a persecutor of Christian to a perfected of Christianity, yet transformation presupposes that the early way of life is not abandoned it is transformed through Adoption of new insights and commitments. In practice, the ingredients of transformation are most often taken from the culture of missionaries the resulting change is then comparable with any other process of acculturation. In Africa most cultural changes under colonial rules and missionary tutelage has been of this kind; thus, the cultural alienation which Africans have suffered under the pretext of modernization.

FIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CIIRISTIAN1TY AND CULTURE

Most of the crisis today in Africa is in the churches, meanwhile it becomes lack of understanding that culture and Christianity look like they arc twined in operation and practice on the most relevant constructive approach to reconcile Christianity and culture.

H. Richard Niebuhr states that "typology of relation between Christ and culture work well for the relation between God and history;

1. God against History

Is the type of mutual and total opposition, evident at apocalyptic and sectarian views that anticipate the imminent end of history and regards history itself has fallen, corrupt and passing away. God acts only to end history and knowledge of yes it is truly supernatural based on miraculous disclosures.

2. God above history

Is the view of mainstream Catholic Theology, Augustine posted two cities, heavenly and earthly in which Christians live. World history transpired in the earthly cities, while the city of God is in the realm of Eternal salvation. The cities are not disconnected and hierarchical

synthesis forms between • them. God acts in the historical realm but principally tojudge and confute worldly designs.

3. God of history

Is the view that espouses an organic relationship between God and history, God is the immanent of power or spirit of history moving and manifestation of God self in it. Here the ng the historical process itself historicized and God can be known from an understanding of the depth and purposes of history. Hegel is the preeminent examples of the type with this image of the Divine idea as the weft that drive across the warp of human passions weaving the fabric of world history.

4. God and History in paradox

This represents form of dualism by contrast with the separation of God against history, the synthetic view of God above history and the holism of the God of history. This is the view in which the Protestant hold on to especially a reformer (Luther), Christians are subject to which tension of obedience to two authorities or kingdoms which do not agree and cannot be synthesize but must be accepted. The relationship between God and history is paradoxical and cannot fully understand.

5. God the transformer of history

This modified the third and fourth types against the third type express a stronger differentiation between God and history. It recognizes history to be the realm of tragic conflict in which good can be brought out of evil. And its beliefs that historical knowledge can serve as corroboration but not as source of Faith. This type is associated with some form protestant liberalism.

A THREAT TO CHRISTIANITY

Christianity lies in achieving greatness in the face of the world's hatred. 'Fifteen-year old Leah Sharibu's refusal to deny Christ and convert to Islam, which cost her freedom, exemplifies what Christians are going through in Nigeria. The threat to make her a slave for life in captivity, by the ' Islamic Jihad in West Africa (ISWAP), a Boko Haram faction, says it all. Her case and those of thousands of Christians being killed because of their faith reveal that Christians are under severe persecution. However, the Nigerian authorities have always downplayed or denied this reality.

Nigeria's population is evenly divided between Muslims and Christians the church in Nigeria has one of the most dynamic evangelical and missionary movements in Africa and indeed the world, with about 7,200 missionaries and a missionary presence in about 196 countries. Nigeria has been delisted from the countries with unengaged unreached peoples groups (UUPGs).

Despite this vibrancy, the future of the church in Nigeria is at stake because of persecution. Although Nigeria is officially not at war, what the church is witnessing is tantamount to a declaration of war against Christians. Especially in rural areas, Christians are being killed and dispossessed of their ancestral farmlands. Their homes are being burnt andmany have internally displaced or taken refuge in neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. Others are in captivity and slavery.

The government feeds the public and international community with misleading narratives and explanations for the terror. This makes it imperative to Provide a coherent and factual account. Indeed, the situation has concerning implications for the future of Christianity, not only in Nigeria, but Africa and globally.

Systemic persecution

The persecution occurs in system, institutionalized, and direct forms. "Persecution can take many different forms. There is of course the obvious and painful one of physical harm. . . . Persecution can also be [subtler]. This occurs when the instruments of the State, particularly in Northern Nigeria, are variously used to target and marginalize Christians. This takes different forms across states, but the pattern is almost predictable. Christian students are denied places to meet for prayer, Bible study, and worship. Christians are denied Certificate of Occupancy (C of 0) for lands where church buildings are already in place. Abductions and forced marriages of young and under-aged Christian girls are common and increasing. This is especially prevalent among the Maguza who convert to Christianity.

Boko Haram and ISWAP

In 2018 to date, Boko Haram had killed more that 20,000 poop and displaced nearly 2.6 million. The Northeast has been hardest hit by attacks on state agents, Christians, and moderate Muslims. SWAP broke away from Boko Haram in 2015 and pledged allegiance to Islamic State. They are holding Leah Sharibu and others in captivity and believe Christians should be their main target.

Fulani herders

Since 2015 there has been n upsurge in violent attacks, predominantly on Christian-dominated farming communities. Fulani herders are predominantly nomads, and Muslims have migrated and lived peacefully with the ethnic nationalities of the Middle belt for decades.

Cattle grazing, which was once relatively peaceful, triggers crime and violence today, leading to killings and displace' cut of thousands of Christians. The Global Terrorism Index 2018 rated Fulani Herder attacks as the second biggest internal security threat in Nigeria after Boko Haram insurgency. The same group is rated the third most deadly terrorist group in the world, after Al-Qaida and Boko Hamm, while Nigeria is ranked the third most terrorized country in the world, after Afghanistan and Syria.

Wider implications

These attacks pose an existential threat to the church in Nigeria and have wider implications for world evangelization. No doubt over time, what is happening now will affect the spread of the gospel through the Nigerian church. Young Christians are discouraged by systemic injustice and the lack of government redress. Some see the church as helpless in fighting back. They conclude that the church leadership is irrelevant to their survival andprotection, having failed to negotiate with the political class. Consequently, some are returning to idolatry, syncretism, African Traditional Religions, drugs, and occultism. If this situation continues, the decline and eventual death of the church could be a matter of years away.

Meanwhile, northern Christians who have ended decades of persecution and who have been willing to die for their faith are beginning to experience faith fatigue and discouragement.

Persistent attacks on Christians are pushing some to opt for a militant response. The implications of terror reach beyond Nigeria. These ethno-religious challenges have become major West African sub-regional security problem which already affects Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. Boko Haram's poison is spreading across the region and the continent, and Africa is under threat of Islamization from Islamic State-inspired groups. However, 'God has the final say! Number of Terrorist Attacks and Victim in 2016 and 2017 respectively:

Country	Attacks	Killed	Injured
Burkina Faso 35	77	40	
	77	118	45
Mali	122	285	215
	196	602	143
Niger	60	367	143
	20	190	72
Nigeria	331	312	1159.
	312	2180	018
TOTAL	548	3851	1557
	605	3090	1482

Source: ECOWARN and Global T Christian responses Terrorism Database

Christian Response

How does the church serve a witness in the contextof persecution? Paradoxically, the attacks have not succeeded in deterring Christians from going to church. Maiduguri, the epicenter of Boko Haram activities in the Northeast is currently experiencing an increase in church attendance.

Many people choose rather to die than to deny their faith in Christ; this exemplifies genuine faith. It is very comforting and reassuring. It also offers the kind of hope only attributable to the work of the Holy Spirit and s divine presence. In the words of one anonymous Nigerian Christian:

They can take our homes, our possessions, our families, our lives. They can drive us out like they've driven us out before. They can humiliate us and dehumanize us. But they cannot take our thoughts. They cannot take our talents. They cannot take our knowledge or our memories or our minds. Indeed, they cannot take our faith or our love for God and his Kingdom in Nigeria.

Global Christians need to demonstrate the ministry of presence: prayer support and physical visits to the persecuted church, including in Nigeria.

Surviving and Thriving

The children of Issachar in 1 Chronicles 12:32 understood the time and helped Israel to act with wisdom. I wish to propose concrete steps, inspired by to the Nehemiac model, which will guide the church to respond adequately to the terror attacks and to thrive.

1. The call and practice of prayer: Nell 2:4-6; Matt 26:41, Luke 18:1

There are voices within the church, saying: 'we have prayed enough' or 'prayer without action is e useless.' I believe prayer and action are not mutually exclusive. We can pray and act, but

action must never substitute for prayer. Jesus enjoined us to watch and pray but neither watch without praying nor pray Without watching. A combination reinforces the church's survival. In a strange way, persecution purifies and strengthens the church. The church is never weak when attacked; it becomes stronger. Prayer in times of persecution promotes revival and revival promotes survival and transformation.

2. Uncommon unity: Neh 2:18; John 17: 20-21

Uncommon unity, both locally and globally, is necessary for the survival of the church in Nigeria. The noticeable disunity among Christians along ethnic and denominational lines sometimes creates a conducive environment for persecution to thrive. Christians in solidarity can achieve more. The church needs to define her mission and build unity around a shared vision. The global church needs to demonstrate her love for the persecuted church through solidarity, advocacy, and publicity.

3. Advocacy and activism: Neh 2:16-20

Consistent activist advocacy is vitally needed in a context of persecution because of the fundamental violation of the right to life which is God given. Any form of persecution which tends towards genocide violates God's vision for creatinghumanity in itsdiversity and must be vigorously exposed [12] 'In the end, we will remember not the word of our enemies but the silence of our friend [13]

4. Situational survey and conflict analysis: Neh 2:12-17

There is need for well-documented empirical research into what is happening t and around the world to Christians in Nigeria, and especially the impact of these attacks on the missionary demographics of the church. The global church could assist practically in this.

5. Survival through self-defense: Neh 4 and 6: 15-16

Nehemiah effectively mobilized his people to defend themselves against attacks. He never asked his people to attack but lie charged them to defend the work and byimplication the land. Defending our ancestral lands need not be confused with defending the church. Only God can defend his church (Matt 16:18). Defending our ancestral lands is imperative; we should not be driven off our God-given land under any guise. There is no biblical mandate for reprisal or retaliatory attacks. However, grassroots mobilization to defend and police our communities through vigilantes is necessary.

6. Proactive internal security measures

Heightened security consciousness has forced churches in many parts of Nigeria to adopt pragmatic measures to protect themselves. Church members take turns to provide security alongside security agents in identifying' strangers coming to church premises. They also act to prevent cars from driving directly into their premises by mounting barricades of concrete boulders and iron bars and by placing logs loaded with sharp nails to puncture tyres of intruders, especially suicide bombers. This is helping immensely.

7. Dialogue and effective engagement: Neh 6

Nehemiah was a 'Christian' in politics. Nehemiah allowed the Bible to dictate his political beliefs, convictions and actions, unlike politicians today who are nominal and merely use their

religion Nehemiah allowed the Bible to dictate his political to advance Political interests devoid of godly values.

Nehemiah effectively engaged his opponents through dialogue but not because he was foolish or compromising. There is a need for interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims working together for peace and reconciliation. Christian clergy need to prevent the potential militancy of their faithful and act jointly against reprisal attacks by Christian youth. Keeping communication lines open will always be positive and promote sustainable peace-building. However, peace-building must be predicated on justice for victims of persecution.

The way forward

Terrorism as we know it today in West Africa thrives on religion, ignorance, and social disaffection. Christians in Nigeria are being killed with targeted precision, posing an existential threat to the church. The virtual abandonment of missions and evangelism in some affected areas represents a clear danger. To succeed in the fight against terrorism, the youth across the religious and ethnic divide need to be united in working proactively to address this existential challenge. We cannot wait for governments to end the cycle of violence in our communities and nations. We each have a role to play Jesus has motivated and inspired me in the role I am playing: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for the will be called the sons of God'. (Matt 5:9). Thankfully, the church's hope in Nigeria remains firm rooted in the God who promised: "I will not leave nor forsake you" (Heb 13:5).

Conclusion

Terrorists' culture serves as a threat to Christianity in Nigeria and globally. Christ is the prince of peace whose disciples toe the way of peace and opt for persuasion instead of violence in their missionary activities. However, due to their favourable dispositions to peace, dialogue, justice, religious freedom and tolerance, the merchants of terror apply the instruments of intimidation, persecution, hatred and assassination on daily basis against Christians in the Nation (particularly in the Northern Nigeria). This culture of terror should be stopped to give room for freedom, peace and progress in Nigeria and in the world.

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