

Security Problems in Nigeria: A Challenge to Christian Women Associations (A. K. A Obinrin Rere)

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ABSTRACT

The insecurity problems being experienced in Nigeria recently reveal that the people involved lack a common outlook to life for the forging of a common sense of societal vision important to the making of a nation. Also the current inability of the Nigerian government to live up to the challenges of ensuring security in the country, was seen as enough ground for Christian women association to come together to seek the face of God for a better society. Hence, this paper examined the various roles Christian women association can play towards achieving peace and security in Nigeria. In order to ascertain the relevance of women on security problems of this nation, reference was made to some notable women in the Bible who were very active in ensuring peace and security of their people. Esther, Deborah and Rahab was said to have understood the security challenges of the children of Israel and they all took the necessary steps to solve the problems. However, the paper revealed that the three women had concern for the salvation and safety of their fellow citizens. The paper equally discussed the word security as a concept, with emphasis on its meaning; various security challenges recently experienced in the nation and its impact on the populace especially women. The paper also evaluates the nature and activities of Christian women association in some selected churches in Nigeria, and posits on what should be their concerns on gender and security discourse. Drawing from the findings made, recommendations on the appropriate approach in curbing security problems in the country are proffered.

Keywords: Women, Security, Gender, Association, Peace

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, sectarian violence had rendered the government and security agencies prostrate and impotent in the face of incessant attacks against the civilian population. In these spirals of violence, civilians have been the victims of attack women alike being at the receiving and at all hazards. The security situation is worsened by the spate of bombings by the Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda Awati Wal. Jihad otherwise called Boko Haram (western education is sinful in Hausa language). This group and some other groups had caused disharmony and disrupt the peaceful co-existence among Nigerians.

However, it is noted that the existence of such groups is an indication of the failure of the government to lead our country on the path of progress, justice, equality and rights. Hence, it could be said that the inability of government to address these challenges had created a culture of self-help on the part of the citizens.

Nevertheless, there have been a number of community initiatives that are positive and constructive. Some of the citizens driven motives like the inter-faith platform provides and exciting model of citizen's process that is credible, neutral and owned by the people. It provides a model that can to reasonable extent fill the gap created by government inability

and allows citizens to re-write the Nigerian narrative especially as it relate to interreligious relationships.

It is therefore against this background that this paper is aim at examining the efforts Christian Women Association can put in place towards achieving peace in the Nigerian society. Although, it could be said the activities of the Christian Women associations in recent time cannot be overlooked as such have continued to determine to a great extent that women are not passive. For instance, the Muslim and Christian Women association call for peace and justice during Nigeria 51st Anniversary is a welcome development. However, more still need to be done both at the local and national levels.¹

Therefore, for the purpose of clarity the first part of this work will take a look at the meaning of security and manifestations of conflict and insecurity in Nigeria. The second part begins with a discourse of some notable biblical women that fought and prayed for the peace and security of their land. The third part discusses the various Christian women Association activities in some selected churches, while the fourth part discusses the challenges before the Christian women association in relation to human security.

Meaning of Security

Several definitions of security abound. I do not want to get involved in the rigor of analyzing and assessing various definition of security which are numerous. I wish to give a few definitions that have been given by scholars.

Generally speaking, the word security according to the oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is "the activities involved in protecting a country, building or person against attack, danger and the likes. It could also be referred to as freedom from danger, fear or anxiety. Examined security in the context of state relation, Patricia Kameri says, "Security connotes the immunity of a state from threats outside territorial boundaries, or the preservation of minimum – core values of a state, namely – political independence and territorial integrity."²

Similarly, Jaiye B, defines security as: A public good that is necessary for causing individual and collective safety, stability and development. It is the primary function and responsibility of the state to deliver this public good, 'security' to its people and communities in an appropriate and accountable manner.³

In a more clear sense, security definition was extended to feminist perspectives by Brothe and Smith in their work.⁴ According to them security from feminist perspective includes freedom from both physical and structure violence. The feminist perspective is further rejected in the National Organization for women whom in its 1990 resolution on women in combat affirmed that:

...Women and children constitute 80 percent of the global refugee population, a phenomenon usually attribute to military conflict. Women are also the most frequent victims of domestic violence in all societies a crime which is always underreported, but on which ranges across regions, cultures and causes.⁵

In a nutshell, security aim should be to protect human from physical violence whether from the state or external states, from violent individuals and sub state actors, from domestic abuse and the likes.

However, full protection from danger and anxiety seem to be absent in Nigerian society in recent time. There is several manifestation of conflict and insecurity in Nigeria among which

are ethno-religious conflict, political based conflicts, economic based violence and organized violent groups.

CONFLICT CASES IN NIGERIA THAT CALLS FOR SECURITY ATTENTION

Nigeria has witnessed series of conflicts that will be highlighted below;

Religious Conflicts

There are different levels of religious conflict in Nigeria. We have intra and inter- religious conflicts. On inter- religious conflicts, Nigeria had witnessed several cases as noted in the work of Terwase Sampson. He observed that between 1999-2012 alone, Nigeria has recorded 30 persistence religious violence.⁶ Although the list is not exhaustive as there are some that had happened between January 2012 to date. Nigeria is a country in the world where the most severe inter- communal violence between Christians and Muslims has been experienced. The causes and the current factors behind the current inter- religious tensions and crisis in Nigeria identified y world Christian's council and The Royal Aal-al Bayt institution on May 2012 include among many others.

- I. Inadequate depth of understanding of both Christians and Islam
- II. Statements and actions of a number of religious leaders which could be understood as condoning or encouraging violence.
- III. The actions and influence of Boko Haram and Taffris, and the ideological influence upon the genesis of Boko Haram.
- IV. Revenge killings by some Christians for the death caused by Boko Haram.
- V. Lack of knowledge and information on a popular level, particularly in local languages of the scriptural- based condemnations of violence and terrorism in both Christianity and Islam⁷

Political Based Violence

Politics in the current civil dispensation like the previous republics have displayed politics of anxiety which has played down on dialogue, negotiation and consensus. Politicians are said to always strategize about the control and retention of power. Rules and regulations changed to the detriment of the masses. Then, in order to stay in power, they usually employ violence and assassination to settle political disputes. Party meetings, campaigns, conventions, choosing of political representatives in government have become war threats⁸.

Economy Based Violence

Economy based violence is prevalent in our country because there is rampant neglect and mismanagement in various sectors. Generally speaking, it could be said that oil in some cases has given rise to vertical and horizontal conflicts among national, state and society. The over – reliance on Federal allocations derived from oil revenue, under-employment, unemployment, lack of assistance on the part of the government to the people of Niger Delta have also contributed to economy based violence in our country⁹.

Organized Violent Groups

These groups include secret cults in tertiary institutions, political thugs, vigilantes, ethnic militia. Various reasons and circumstances account for their emergence. These set of people on different occasions have been involved in many violent attacks that have resulted into loss of lives, valuable properties and displacement of people in their abode. Up to now they still

engage in acts of violence of which both the security agents and government alike have not been able to proffer possible solutions to.

Having discussed briefly some conflict and insecurity problems in Nigeria, a cursory look at some insecurity problems in the Bible where women played significant roles will be looked into below. This is necessary because it will serve not only as a reference point and lesson for women, but it will encourage them to strategize and work towards achieving peace for the Nigeria nation.

BRIEF STORY OF ESTHER AND THE SECURITY CHALLENGE OF THE JEWS PEOPLE

Esther was said to be a Jewish of Benjamin descendant of the captivity to Babylon with Jeconiah (599 or 597). She was born abroad, of a family which chose to remain instead of returning to Jerusalem. Mordecai probably held some office in the palace (Esther 2:5, 21-23). Vashti the queen was divorced for refusing to show people her beauty. Esther was chosen out of the fairest virgin collected out of the provinces, as her successor.

Ahasuerus, the king unaware of her race granted leave to Haman his favorite, who was offended with Mordecai for not given him reverence, to destroy the whole people to which Mordecai belonged. Esther, at the risk of her own life, dutiful to her adoptive father and regardless of his counsels though a queen, having faith in the high destiny of her nation, and believing with Mordecai that even if she held her peace at the crisis, deliverance would arise to the Jews from another person.

However, Esther dared to risk death for her people and so escaped dying with them. By her patriotism, she won for her nation a great deliverance and God used her as an instrument of His providence for the working out of glorious purpose. Therefore, it could be said that from her character, one learns that:

1. It is good to seek divine guidance in times of difficulty (4: 15-17).
2. To value and seek the cooperation of fellow believers.
3. It is necessary to be ready to renounce self for the good of others

Deborah: The Females Patriot

Deborah- the Prophetess and Judge lived under the palm tree, wife of Lapidoth, “a mother in Israel”, a patriotic and inspired heroine like Mariam. But Deborah did more than prophecy; she aroused the nation from its despair and lethargy. Hers was a fearless and unsolicited devotion to the emancipation of God’s people, and she invokes in them the determination to free themselves from their wretched bondage and degradation.

Having fought with words, she went forth throw off the oppressors yoke with swords. During her time, Jabin the king oppressed the Northern tribe adjacent to Hazor his capital (Zebulun, Naphtali and Issachar, which she judged). Barak at her call summoned those in long train chariots toward the broad topped Mount Tabor. Deborah accompanied him at his request having God as her Ally conquered the enemies of Israel. Thus Deborah gained undying fame as the female warrior who rescued her people from their cruel foes.¹¹

Rahab, the Spies and the Security Challenge of the Nation Israel

Rahab was the harlot of Jericho who received Joshua spies. Rahab perhaps knew the security challenge of the children of Israel, the exodus of the miraculous passage of the Red sea, and the overthrow of Sihon and Og. God made the truth to bring conviction to her mind that Israel

would conquer Canaan. Faith induced her, at the risk of her life, to shelter the spies under the stalks of flax spread.

Although, her deceiving the king of Jericho and saying, “they had gone, she knew not where,” is not commended in scripture, but only the faith which was the mainspring of her conduct. Scripture forbids a lie, or any evil doing, that good may come (Rom 3: 7, 8). Her efforts by securing the spies is however commendable. Her hospitality to the spies was for the lord’s sake.

However, with the above in mind, it could be said that Christian women can draw a big lessons from the examples given above. This will therefore lead one to take a cursory look at the activities of Christian women Association within some selected denomination.

CHRISTIAN WOMEN ASSOCIATION

The Christian women association is a church- wide body for Christ. Each denomination in Nigeria mainly the mainline, Pentecostal and African Independent churches have their women group commonly refer to as “Good women association”. Membership is exclusively for adult female members in local assemblies. Most Good women’s fellowship or association started with the inception of each denomination. Ever since, the associations have been growing in spell and bounds, caring for the social, material, development and the spiritual needs of the members and notably the growth and expansion of their various churches. Some of their programs and activities include the following:

Community Impact

This is borne out of their passion for souls; hence the Good women usually use the medium of community service to spread the word of God. The services they render include medical check –ups and provision of sample drugs, sanitation, and provision of food and clothes for the needy in the community. For example, Akintunde in her book gave a record of the achievements of the Christ Apostolic Good Women Association to be:

- a. Successful establishment and maintenance of Babalola Memorial Girl’s Grammar School, Ilesa in Osun State, for the training of C. A. C girls in 1959.
- b. Establishment of C. A. C school of Midwifery at Ede, in 1959 which has till date trained about 20,000 women.

(Construction of modern structure for the family of Late Apostle Ayo Babalola at his hometown in Odo- Owa, Kwara State.

An end to fighting. Also, women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET), a women association present in several countries of West Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria) created from the broader of West Africa Network for Peace building. Also, WIPNET’S women different actions were featured in a 2008 documentary “Pray the devil back to hell”. This film focused Also, Christian women societies of Catholic, women missionary union of the Baptist church and the mothers union in Anglican Church engaged in philanthropist work. These include donations to orphanages, prisons, organizations of seminars and involvement in other charitable programs. Likewise, women in Aladura churches in Nigeria are involved in midwifery, prison visitation and helping of female inmates to acquire useful skills.

Provision of Finance for Members

They usually raise funds for all members of the fellowship that are in need.

When Women Pray

This is a quarterly program that attends to the spiritual need of the members, the church and the nation. At times, men of God are invited to anchor the programs. God has blessed them tremendously through the program. When women pray, great things happen.

Christian Women Association Concerns

With the magnitude of impacts of insecurity against women (like unacceptable sexual violence, increase in female heading households once men go to war, forceful displacement of women into refugee camps, the catapult of women into family headship) there is need for Christian women association to work towards alleviating the problems. In Nigeria, what is paramount is security of lives and properties, good governance and peaceable environment, the bedrock of progress and development. But it would not just happen, it has to be worked out by all and sundry nurtured and developed. In this regard, women have to be involved just like they have been doing. Women have been noted to be making positive difference in conflict management in some African countries. In South African, among others, Women's peace organizations and coalitions have played a crucial role in helping to bring peace. In Sierra Leone, grassroots women's organizations organized public demonstrations and made radio broadcasts to express their desire for on the actions that took place during the women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace campaign. The women were respectively members of Christian and Muslim association and they decided to join their efforts towards peace.

The question now is, in what ways can Christian women associations be involved, How would they go about it since much desired results have never being achieved even with the proposed government amnesty for Boko Haram Sects. From the gender point of view, the answer is hereby given in the light of the statement made by Ajodo, that, "women are capable of working out peace since they have the admirable traits of talk to finish, rather than fight to finish". Women are noted to have a moderate tone, a less aggressive attitude and easier communication.

Therefore, the Christian women associations can first go about peace making by raising their international awareness on the Nigeria Security problems both in their local and national meetings. This can be done successfully by organizing conferences and seminars to identify the causes and the key factors behind the security problems in Nigeria. The results of their findings can be published and ensure that the texts make their way through into Nigerian schools and Universities curriculum.

In addition to the above, is the fact that women are naturally peace lovers. According to Bridgit Brockton study by Ferris¹⁸, he says, there is an innate ability in women that makes them prefer non- violent actions in their social relations. Babbit and Rearson- D' Estress observed that conflict resolution workshop with women usually came out with more constructive discussions than group mixed with mixed sex.¹⁹. Therefore for this belief about women, Christian women associations in collaboration with government can use her vast resources of human beings and materials towards achieving dissolution of pervasive religious and political fanatics causing untold hardship, turbulent and tensions for the country.

Furthermore, Christian women associations must be involved in conflict prevention, resolution and management efforts at all levels because they constitute the majority considering their population. When they are not active participants, the views, needs and interests of half of the population are not represented and therefore interventions will not be appropriate or enduring.

Lastly, the place of prayer in solving security problems cannot be ruled out. Women are noted to be more prayerful and even more religious than men. So, there is need for them to come together and pray for the peace of the land. Their prayers should not be limited to their personal prayers. For instance, it has been observed among womenfolk that at times when prayers are raised for the nation the tempo with which they pray abnormally go down since it is not personal prayers. The Christian women should Association should note that security problems in the country can be likened to a demon that need to be cast out with prayers and fasting. The security problems in Nigeria are just like the case of the boy in the Bible that had deaf and dumb spirit. The disciples of Jesus Christ could not solve the problem not only because they lacked faith, but that they did not apply the principle of prayers and fasting as suggested by Jesus. (Matthew 6: 20-29). Also the principle of prayers and fasting applied by Esther can be adopted by our Christian women. Esther prayed and fasted for the Jews nation and Haman their oppressor was not only put to shame but he faced the penalty of death sentence. Hence, it could be said that, Christian women associations need to come together, pray and fast so that an end will come to the hydra headed monster of insecurity and its attendant scourge in our nation.

CONCLUSION

It is safe to conclude that the governments on their part can empower women politically and economically. If Christian women have access to political offices and decision making, their voices would be heard whenever they make any recommendations to the government. There is need for government to collaborate with Christian women associations and involve them in conflict related intervention. Inclusion of Christian women association in policy initiatives of the government in human security is a necessity and should be made a matter of priority.

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