
Preamble:

We, the Rectors of Seminaries in Nigeria met at the Spiritan School of Philosophy Isienu, Nsukka, and deliberated on the theme: Christian Witness in the Face of Islamic Militancy.

The Church in Nigeria is passing through a very trying time more than ever before. The recent massacre of two Catholic priests and some parishioners during Holy Mass in Benue State and similar killings in other parts of the country strike a deep note on the ears of the populace. With all the human efforts put in place to promote dialogue, the impression for now is that dialogue is not bearing the desired fruit. The recent letter of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria addressed to the President of the federation on the state of the nation speaks for itself.

Nigeria and the Experience of Islamic Fundamentalism:

For a better understanding of Islamic violence in Nigeria, it is very important to see Islamic violence within the context of the historical evolution of the Nigerian State. Prior to the advent of the British colonizers and the formation of the Nigerian State, Islam had already been firmly established in both the Kanem-Borno Empire and the Sokoto Caliphate in some of the areas now Known as northern Nigeria.

The history of radical Islam in Nigeria dates back to the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio in the 19th Century. In his fight against the British colonizers and the local monarchies, Dan Fodio waved the flag of pure Islam and refused all Western Culture.

In subsequent years we had witnessed the violence caused by Gardawa, Maitatsine, Qur'aniyyun, Izala, al-Janna Tabbas and in more recent times Boko Haram and the Fulani-Herdsmen.

Boko Haram has been launching ceaseless attacks on churches, schools, communities, government properties and security agencies leading to loss of thousands of human lives and invaluable properties. And today we see the intractable and ferocious Fulani-Herdsmen going further to kill, dispossess and occupy territories to the utter embarrassment of Nigerians. In the meantime, the government has failed to checkmate the situation.

These groups are still reeling in the grief of the collapse of both the Caliphate and the Empire. They are motivated by the ideology that Islam has to rule in all spheres of life. Above all, western civilization is antithetical to Islam, and it is not possible for Islam to co-exist with democracy and with those they call infidels. It is in this context that Islamic violence in Nigerian has been prevalent.
The Response of the Church:

- The Church has so far grappled with this problem through prayers, inter-religious dialogue and, consistently preached and practiced forgiveness in the face of these violence. Moreover, the Church has employed the use of press conferences, retreats, conventions, seminars and communiqué to condemn the dastardly acts of terrorism.

Recommendations:
1. The Church and other noble agencies should continue to correct the distorted historical narrative of fundamentalist's ideology which identifies colonialism and western civilization with Christianity.
2. Throughout the history of fundamentalism, ignorance plays a vital role. Hence the Church and the government should continue to foster education at the grassroots and establish schools where they are not found.
3. The militants are mostly recruited from the poverty stricken and unemployed masses. Therefore, the government, Church and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) should honestly strive for the economic emancipation of the masses through sustainable empowerment programs.
4. Christians should play active role in the democratic process and in policy formulation in Nigeria.
5. Christians should use the power of unity to counter Islamic extremism.
6. The Church leadership should work closely with peace-loving Muslims to tackle the problem of injustice that fuels fundamentalism.
7. The defense of life is a legitimate right and duty which every Christian should foster.
8. Understanding fundamentalist groups, their ideologies and how to counter these ideologies should form an integral part of seminary formation and general Christian faith formation.
9. Government should be held accountable for the life of every citizen irrespective of religion or ethnic group.

Conclusion:
In the face of these terrorist attacks, Christians should remain resolute in professing their faith and bearing witness to Christ. We implore Nigerians to continue to pray for peace and unity as we ask for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen and Mother of Nigeria.

Issued on 5th May, 2018.

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