

# CURBING THE MENACE OF KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA (THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH)

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## **Abstract**

*This work “curbing the menace of kidnapping in Nigeria: The Role of the Church” is a contemporary issue in the Nigerian landscape. Kidnapping, now a lucrative criminal economic venture in Nigeria has its genesis in the well articulated political agitations for a better deal in the Niger Delta. It was a means of achieving policy agenda through maximum use of force. Kidnapping therefore is the illegal taking away of an individual or group or persons and keeping them as prisoners in order to get money or something else for returning them. This therefore constitutes a menace to the nation. This work, is therefore designed to examine the advent of this menace in Nigeria, spotlighting the rationale/motivations for this act as well as the consequences/effects on the nation, with some suggestions/remedial strategies to complement the effort of the church in curbing this menace in Nigeria.*

Kidnapping according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is “to take somebody away illegally and keep them as prisoners especially in order get money or something else for returning them”. This definition properly sets the stage for understanding the latest economic epidemic currently ravaging the nooks and crannies of the geo-political entity called Nigeria. To the vast majority of culprits, kidnapping is just an economic venture. However, there is another angle to this menace. It is the political connection and militancy.

The church universally has always been known to be pious, and show respect to constituted authority. They must not be seen as activists or condoning any act seen or judged to run counter to the judicial system of any society of existence. It is therefore not surprising that often, especially in the remote 'past that the political leaders often consult the churches to find a way out of any impasse.

Eyede (2010), posited that the Old Testament of the Holy Bible abound with such examples and they include;

- i. Joseph through the spirit of God provided a way out of economic strangulation (Global Economic Meltdown) Gen. 41.
- ii. Elijah had to intervene for God to send down rain to Israel after three and half (3 ½) years of draught. (I Kings 18.)
- iii. When the nation of Israel were in dire need of a political leader, Prophet Samuel

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- was called upon to anoint Saul, I Sam 15 and when Saul failed politically,
- iv. Prophet Samuel (the Church) again anointed David for a new direction. I Sam 16.

In the New Testament, Jesus spoke of the Church as a kind of Vanguard. He declared that the Church (Christians) are the salt and light to the World (Government) Matt. 5:13-16. This implies that the Church is to leave above board. They are not expected to participate in crime at all, talk less of violent crime such as kidnapping. As a further charge to the Church at His physical departure from the earth, He told them in Mt. 26:41 to Watch and Pray.

### **The Advent of Kidnapping in Nigeria**

Kidnapping, now a lucrative criminal economic venture in Nigeria has its genesis in what most Nigerian political analysts would believe to be well articulated political agitations for a better deal in the Niger Delta. It was what policy students would rather see as means of achieving policy Agenda through maximum use of force. When almost at the stage of saying "Bravo" to the youths that plan and orchestrated (executed) the entire struggle when some interesting dimensions came up. If the Church must pray with some intelligence, then they must take the simple advice of our Lord Jesus Christ seriously. Let them Watch (get knowledge) and then Pray.

To guarantee effective prayer Nwokedi (2010), in his article on the internet, "History of Terrorism and kidnaping in Nigeria". Seems to have captured the entire drama of kidnapping trade in Nigeria. In his blow-to-blow account of the history of kidnapping in Nigeria, he pointed out the following powerful truths.

- i. Kidnapping was relatively unknown in Nigeria in the early years of Nigeria's independence in 1960.
  - ii. It became noticeable in the late 90's
  - iii. The crime from its own definition reflects the breakdown of law and order in society and a sign that formal authority is ineffectual and that checks and balances in government are not working. Weekly trust would rather refer to it as symptoms of a failed state.
  - iv. The kidnapers grow their trade on the assumption that there is no justice and equity provided by any organisation of society as to encourage work and honest living. Money is held too high above every other values.
  - v. They see any man's wealth as belonging to all but appropriated by the more powerful. That is, the act on the principle of "survival of the fittest" in the jungle.
  - vi. The Nigeria society lacks proper education and civic responsibilities.
- Above were the fundamentals upon which the crimes of kidnappings in Nigeria were predicated.

### **Motivations/Reasons for Kidnapping in Nigeria**

In the light of the above, Nwokedi (2010), however advanced the following as more specific issues for the present state of the crime. Some of the issues are:

- i. Money for election
- ii. Youth unemployment

- iii. Growing ignorance of young people as a result of poor education and low quality life.
- iv. Stupendous and inexplicable wealth of some people other than the fact that they are involved in some acts of looting public treasury or coup plotting (Legalized terrorism). They become heads of government or government appointees.
- v. Benefits of violence through heroic dispositions such as blaring of sirens to forcefully clear the road for military personnel to go through; - The aspirations of the youth minded. Everybody wants to be a hero.
- vi. The police uniformed and armed are provided by public money, but freely extort the very people they were meant to protect. Nobody seems to frown. So the youths see nothing wrong.
- vii. Finally, the youths came to realization that in Nigeria, only the rich gets justice. It does not matter how you get rich. Just get rich.

In addition to all these, Nwokedi further pointed out that .while the military sowed the seed of violence into the Nigeria society right from 1963, the quasi civilian government watered it with selfishness and greed. All these went under the watchful eyes of the Church that raised no eyebrow. Further, the same writer pointed out that government produced cheap arms and ammunitions under the disguise of Amnesty Programme. In this words

*Who does not know that new guns were purchased and handed over to the militants for them to submit and collect their pay-offs in public views? Who is so daft as not to understand that the real guns were auctioned at Ngwa land to local gun runners at as low as N25, 000. 00 per Ak47 and many for less? Who is then surprised that this region (Abia State) would then be the hot bed for kidnapping?*

If these revelations do not make the Church weep and take to sack cloth then someone should try to convince me that I am still sane. Even the Lord Jesus for the simple reason of unbelief in Jn. 11:35 wept. The Church must wake up to realities of insincerity of government which specialises at deceits (Nwokedi, 2010).

On the other angle to kidnapping crime in Nigeria, Adalaku (2010) via the Internet chronicled the events that led to the present debate. According to him Sept 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Ijaw Youths Council (IYC) threatened to attack British nationals and facilities in the Niger Delta area if the British police failed to release the former Governor of Bayelsa State - Governor Alemesiagha who was arrested in London for money laundering. Nigerian government (and the Churches) ignored the threat. Sept 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Alhaji Asari Dokubo - leader of the Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) was arrested by the Nigerian government in connection with the rising tension within the Niger Delta Region. These and many others precipitated the kidnapping and aggressive militancy in the Niger Delta.

## **The Consequences/Effects of Kidnapping in Nigeria**

There is no doubt in the statement that consequence/effects of kidnapping and aggressive militancy on the Nigerian nation is not only grievous and devastating, but a high socio-economic and political set back to the nation. Below are some of the consequences/effects of the act on the nation according to Adelakun (2010).

- i). On Sept. 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005, and armed NDPVF militants attacked and seized pumping stations in Port Harcourt, a facility that produces 7000 barrels per day.
- ii). On Jan. 11th, 2006, first reported case of abduction of expatriates took place. Four (4) foreign workers for Shell were kidnapped in Port Harcourt.
- iii). Jan 15<sup>th</sup>, 2006, there was another militant attack in the Niger Delta area. About 10 persons including soldiers lost their lives.
- iv). March 2006, attack on Agip Oil Company drastically cut Nigerian Oil Production with about 26 percent.
- v). Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, another attack claimed the lives of about 5 soldiers.
- vi). Jan 25<sup>th</sup> 2007, Chinese workers were kidnapped in Bayelsa state but were released on Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007 after 11 days detention, thus leaving them in shock and fear.
- vii). Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007 - a British expatriate oil worker who was taken hostage with an American in Jan. 23<sup>rd</sup> was released.
- viii). Feb 9<sup>th</sup>, militants then pressurized the Nigerian government to extend the hostilities to other parts of the country.

Such was the chronicle of events that led to the writer to conclude that “unarguably, the major security problem that seemed to be shaking the Nigerian nation is the series of foreign oil and construction workers as well as the oil facilities and militants in the Niger Delta region in the southern part of Nigeria. Such were some of the events that heralded the new lucrative crime in Nigeria. The stage was set by what seemed to be genuine political agitation. To this Nwokedi (2010), again asserted that: “When the international pressure came, the youths shifted to kidnapping of white oil workers in the Niger Delta as well as being indulged in bunkering. With greater security for these people, they turned to their own people who actually represented these foreigners. When again, security was tightened for these people, these jobless youths turned on children and elderly ones. Now, it is everybody including state governors.

But let no one be quick to conclude that kidnapping and terrorism is a monopoly of the Niger Delta. The Week Trust Magazine in an article in the Net on the 1st of November, 2010, captioned 'The Rising Wave of Kidnapping in Nigeria’ declared, “The phenomenon has taken an alarming dimension in Nigeria such that it has become a big business. Kidnapping hitherto known only in the Niger Delta is now a daily occurrence in Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti, Oyo and many other states in the country”.

In its own contribution as to the Igbo connection, Iwanyanwu as quoted by site admin (2010) in a commentary report affirmed that he was reliably informed that “Many Igbos were involved in the Niger Delta agitations for improved amenities in the oil

producing communities and when President Musa Yar'Adua granted Amnesty to the militants, the Niger Delta militants shoved the Igbo militants aside ... these dejected militants of Igbo extraction were left in the Lurch after the hard struggle and now they have no option than to continue kidnapping to make a living and to attract attention". Mgbeahurike, Nwanosike and Orji (2010), x-raying the crime of the moment stated succinctly "Fear reigns in South Eastern cities and rural communities with kidnappers all over the place".

Unlike their progenitors (in crime) however, the same writers went on to state sympathetically that "Many observers are concerned that there appears to be no ideology under tone... only the pursuits of criminal gain". It has become the most lucrative business venture in the South East zone for the hoodlums with several billions of Naira lost to abductors".

Kidnapping in the South East has been so rampant and lucrative that youths in the area now refer to it as business. Very sad situation. The reason for this, according to weekly Trust, "is simply that the chances of apprehending kidnappers by law enforcement officers are very remote. So it encourages the trade. In fact many graduates that avowed the business are of the view that the only risk involved is that of being caught. To them, the lucrateness and inefficiencies of our Police force far over weighed that fear.

### **The Role of the Church in Curbing the Menace of kidnapping in Nigeria:**

It is worth mentioning that all the accounts narrated above are to the knowledge of the entire Nigerian society to which the Church is part and parcel. Surprisingly, in all the goings, the Church seems to have maintained silence. Only God knows. Yet the Church seems to have answers to the entire drama.

Funny enough the Church seems to be aware of all the happenings around. At least, not until the battle was taken to their doorstep. Jesus in Mt. 18 says "the gate of hell shall not prevail against the Church. But it was not until the kidnapping trade was taken to the gate of the Church, did the church seem to be awakened. In Aug, 2009, a popular Pentecostal Gospel Preacher in Benin was abducted. Then signal was sent to the church that the ministers are not going to be spared after all. This was the only period the church was known to have mobilised for corporate prayers. The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) under the leadership of Papa Ayo Oritsejafor suddenly saw the need to pray. Unconfirmed source even claimed that the PFN President had to personally mediate between kidnappers and abductors to secure release. Praise God, the minister was released barely a week after. The church claimed that they did not pay a ransom for the release. Several others have since been reported to have been kidnapped on their way back from Churches. So the battle seem to still be within the gates to the Church.

The scripture enjoined believers in the book of James 1:5 that "if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God". The ministers of God must begin now to ask for wisdom

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on one of this illicit trade called kidnapping.

Joseph had done this before and saved a generation. In his life time, Daniel in a determined effort to save his colleagues and other citizens of his time sought God's wisdom to unravel the dream that was on King Nebuchadnezzar's head. God obliged his Prophet. It must be mentioned also that when Samaria was threatened by an evil army of Syria in II Kings 6:8-23, it took just one Prophet called Elisha to change the course of events in favour of his country Israel by revealing the secrets of the evil plan of the Syrian army· generals. Who says that if the Church prays, that God cannot or will not reveal the secrets of these kidnappers? The church must pray.

The Church have not done much to contribute towards the stoppage of kidnapping in Nigeria. Apart from few cases of not too well coordinated corporate prayers, one have hardly heard of the churches in Nigeria coming together either under the canopy of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) or PFN to discuss the issue currently plaguing the nation. Not a voice of condemnation has been heard except for the occasional utterances of few clergy men when school children were abducted in Abia state, some few weeks back. What are our Christian leaders waiting for? Maybe they are waiting for these kidnappers to come right into the Church during services to abduct them. Afterwards, the Church in the Acts of the Apostles had to learn bitter lessons before they saw the need to pray. James was killed and the Church was silent. But when Herod arrested Peter, the Church sensed danger. Our contemporary Churches must learn some lessons there and act now.

## **Conclusion**

This work can however be concluded by re-emphasising that kidnapping has become a social menace in our country. More sad is it that the church in Nigeria is a spectator. She fails to point out the danger sign post of Is. 3:1-14. What peace we often forfeit and our sins are grieved to bear. The Church must wake up to reality. Perhaps God in His mercy will remember His word in II Chr. 7: 14 and visit Nigeria again.

Let the Church realise that kidnapping is far from being the quiet and peaceable life implied in I Tim 2: 1-3. Nigeria churches must arise to pray not only for our leaders but for all men especially our youths who are anxious to grip powers.

Come to think of it, has it occurred to us that the youths carrying out this distasteful acts are actually children of Church members? And that most of them attend our churches at least, on Sundays? Ministers, where are our Prophets? or have they been taken away? The church must corporately rise to pray and take this social menace like many others to God. But if they (the Church) remain quiet, posterity will not vindicate us.

If the youths in their usual characteristics continue to be on rampage and the Church remain on-lookers, they will grab the powers and the Church must be prepared

to reap the benefits of their obnoxious laws. Let the Church be warned and rise to pray for our Holy Book the Bible says in Hos. 6:1. *woe unto him that is at ease in Zion*. There will be no protection even in the government house.

### **Recommendations**

Consequent upon the above findings, it is therefore the recommendation of this work that the church must see beyond just praying;

- 1). She must have intelligent network to watch so that she can pray effectively. They must be at breast with the latest antics or devices of the evil ones. Let them read not only the bible but newspapers, literatures, magazines and government bulletins. She must monitor the electronics media (local and international) browse the Internet, consult and conduct researches to ascertain the true nature of crime in their society of abode.
- 2). Also the Church must speak out in one voice against evil. Possibly, CAN should be a voice of the Church to the government.
- 3). Above all, let the Church cut down on their ostentatious life style where even men of God now behave as if they are God themselves. They have imbibed not just the culture of unbelievers as implied in Mt. 23:1-10 but that of the military for that matter. What with, men of God attending Church services, blowing sirens and displaying wealth which no Church member can really explain the source?
- 4). The Church in Nigeria must be positively involved in governance by organising seminars, retreats and conferences with the theme of current happenings in the country with the sole aim of either helping to facilitate the implementation of government policies or discouraging the evil vices. For instance how about a retreat targeted at youth with the theme *ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF KIDNAPPINGS FOR THE CHRISTIAN YOUTHS*.  
At such retreats, the Church through press conferences may then have the opportunity to erase from (some) people's mind the concept that kidnapping is an economic venture with only the minimum risk of being caught.
- 5). Let the Church, take advantage of the long vacation of schools to keep students in camp for positive re-orientation. Church, rise up and take your place.

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