

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS PANACEA TO YOUTH MILITANCY IN
THE NIGER DELTA OF SOUTHERN NIGERIA**

By

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Abstract

One major problem besetting the Niger delta is youth militancy. Indeed, the region bordering the Niger Delta has been plagued with youth restiveness and this phenomenon has continually taken a heavy toll on human and material resources, peace and development. Suffice to say that it has given the region a toga of notoriety. Expectedly, one of the pressing and obviously daunting challenges facing political leaders and policy makers alike has been ways of stemming the preponderance of youths who seem to have taken militancy as a pastime. Specifically, the Niger Delta is one of the most research regions in Nigeria and there has a plethora of insightful analyses. However, a major area that needs to be further explored is the aspect of moral/religious education. Given the fact that Nigerians are naturally religious, it becomes evident that providing religious education to youths would go a long way in resolving the phenomenon of youth militancy. Given religions emphasis on rectitude, spirituality, good neighborliness, brother's keeper, compassion and forgiveness for the ultimate aim of building conscience and molding personality, religious education offers a veritable panacea to the problems of youth militancy in the Niger Delta.

Introduction

Over the years, Niger Delta had been tagged "Security risk area" to which many national and international communities have warned their nationalities no to live or even travel down to. This owes principally to the menace of youth militancy in the area. Even, the Nigeria police, an institution charged with the responsibility of curbing the youth militancy, have failed in their duties. Many of them do rent arms and ammunitions out to youth militants and even some of them even engage

in the militancy. In view of the situation highlighted above, meaningful development couldn't take place. It can only take place from a creative, responsible and disciplined mind which can only be achieved through sound religious education. As such, religion has the potential of significant roles in the curbing the youth militancy in the Niger Delta.

For instance, religion fosters national unity and development. That is every nation or individual strives after unity and development, but it is an objective most people or nations take for granted¹. It also defined that "nation building is an Herculean task whose magnitude only very few realize"². Any effort at building a virile nation should not be lost sight of or ignore the spiritual and material well being of man taken as a whole if it is to succeed. Religions therefore, have a vital role to play in the Niger Delta societies.

Likewise, religions offer people the understanding of existence and provide rules and regulations which controls people behavior as it is believed that to live a godly life according to one's religion is to carry out one's duty both to God and men³. Religion is also characterized as a sound entity that is functional in the sense that it contribute to the maintenance of societal stability of equilibrium. In stable societies, development is imminent.

What is Religions Education?

Religions education can be seen as a process through which a person learns something which his society believes is related to God. Religious education can also be described as those processes designed to induct each new generation into the attitudes, beliefs as well as the practices of a religions or faith in order to promote the religion and at the same time provide for the individual a unifying center for his life⁴.

What is Youth?

The word “youth” is defined by Chambers Dictionary⁵ “as the state of being youth, early life, the period immediately following childhood” Hornby⁶ sees youths as “the time when a person is young, especially the time before a child becomes an adult, the youth is seen as young people considered as a group.” Also, a youth is elastic in its definition but it can be describe as the state of being young⁷. That is, young man of a fair countenance. Youth is also see as a period or state or quality of being young⁸. This definition however puts us in a dilemma as to the determination of what age brackets fall within the classification of youths. Some scholars believed that, the youth fall within the “teens” bracket. Others extend it to age of 40 and that last, believes that any body irrespective of his or her age that possesses the traits of a youth, falls within this classification. One would want to associate with the last school of thought, which has no age restriction.

However, the conventional definition is that youth is a transitional period between childhood and manhood. He is possessed by idealism on and the needs for change. A youth is optimistic person, who is aware of himself and cannot relent in his efforts to exist in spite of all odds. He is an asset to progress and development. Youth is always associated with some significant changes from the social and personal view points, which include developing sexually and the ability to procreate. It also involves further psychological awareness and social training as well as acquisitions of specific skills by the youth which allows him to behave. In fact, being a youth is an era in a historical sense⁹. It is also, opined that whatever the perception of people on the concept of youth, the fact remains that it is a universally held belief that the youth of any nation are the leaders of tomorrow¹⁰. They are seen as the vehicle through which positive changes can be realized. Furthermore, no nation in the world ever plays with the future development of its

youths. Government, parents, guardians, school etc. devote a lot of time and resources in order to explore and harness the potentialities of the youth. The societies that play down or relegate the orderly developing of its youth are in effect toying with the future progress and development of that particular societies because their disorganized foundation will lead to grave consequence

The Role of the Youth in a Society

As we said earlier, that the youth is characterized by physical as well as emotional vigour to carry out task of building and moving the nation to greater height, there is no guidance and proper brought up will doom to such a nation. The uprightly brought up youths are part and parcel of instrument of reforming of the society. This onerous duty cannot be carried out effectively, except the fundamental challenge of knowledge acquisition in all its ramification must be embraced in order to make this work of propagation and religious awareness effectively¹¹

The Impacts of Youth Militancy in the Niger Delta

The youth militancy in the Niger Delta of Nigeria is increasingly attracting international attention due both to the growing security threat it portends for the Nigerian state and, particularly, due to its impact on international oil prices. Although the Niger Delta problem has been around for several decades, the emergence of organized and youth militant pressure groups in the 1990s has added a new dimension to the crisis. Protests and the threat of outright rebellion against the state are now ubiquitous.

Therefore, the Nigerian context, with recent developments in the Niger Delta region, has demonstrated that the proliferation of arms is partly responsible for the continuation of the youth militancy. This influenced the creation of a national

committee on the proliferation and illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons in the year 2000 amid escalation of youth militancy in the region ¹².

Some of the impacts of these armed militias as follows:

- Up to 150,000 barrels of crude oil being stolen daily by militants and their local and foreign collaborators since 2008
- The militants have gathered enough military hardware to terrorize other ethnic nationalities in the region, notably the Itsekiri and Urhobo in order to sustain instability in the Niger Delta and to proliferates small arms for robbery and piracy in the Delta region and throughout the country;
 - From 2008 till date 33 Joint Task Force, JTF, personnel had been killed, 38 missing, 55 wounded, while 5 military gunboats had been destroyed, 3 seized, 24 automatic weapons and 579 rounds of ammunition captured
 - The militants have attempted, with surface-to-air missiles, to shoot down one naval helicopter and Air Force helicopter
 - On May 13, 2009, members of the JTF on routine escort duties around Chanomi creek were ambushed by a militant group killing 11 soldiers. Prior to this, the militants hijacked an NNPC chartered tanker, CMSPIRIT, with both local and foreign crew, some of which were tortured to death and others held hostage¹³. The overall sample of selected cases of abductions/kidnapping for ransom (2002–2003) are summarized in the table below:¹⁴

Date/Action	Company	Group/Ethnic State	Purpose of Action	Reported Outcome
June-July 2003 Staff Kidnapping	Oil Servicing Company/Shell Contractor	Militant Youth Gang, Ekeremor LGA, Ijaw/Bayelsa State	Ransom of 3.1 million NG Naira	State government intervention-release of hostages after 14 days

November 11-13 2003 Oil Barge Kidnapping of Staff (9) and Military Escorts (4)	Shell barge contractor	Ijaw youth militants in Bomadi/Burutu Lgas/Delta State	Ransom demand of 24.5 NG Naria	Release after 2 days after threats from state and associated security agencies
November 2003 Kidnapping of 14 staff	Chevron Texaco	Militant Ijaw youths/Bayelsa State	Ransom demand	State intervention
Kidnapping of 19 staff	Nobel Drilling	Ijaw Militias/Delta State	Ransom demand	State intervention
November-December 2003	Bredero Shaw Oil Servicing Co. (Shell)	Militant Ijaw Youths/Delta State	Ransom demand \$5 million	State intervention/negotiation

Regardless of its original justification, the current youth militancy in the Niger Delta appears to have been perverted, misdirected and criminalized by opportunists. It appears that the recent upsurge and attraction to armed conflict and violence by youth militias, may have been motivated by crass economic opportunism and profiteering, through hostage taking for ransom and through illegal oil bunkering with external commercial networks¹⁵.

Aside the militarization of the region by the state and oil companies to sustain the uninterrupted flow of oil, the state also initiated or established institutions to address the demand of the people. The question is how effective are these institutions?

The reaction of the state and that of effected communities can be generalized as follows¹⁶:

Violation	Oil Company Response	State Response	Community Response
Water Pollution	Launch community development project(s)	Militarization of communities	Make representation/grievance to government
Farmland Destruction	Supply small arms to government for protection of facilities	Divide community groups	Advance dialogue with government
Destruction of Aquatic Life	Non-responsive	Separate settlement with community elites	Public demonstrations
Wildlife Destruction	Non-responsive	Offers Weak institutional response	Hostage Taking has occurred
Poor Living Conditions	Offer of part-time employment to community members	Interventionist agency response: OMPADEC NDDC	Armed confrontation/Outreach to International Community

The Role of Religious Education on Youths

No religion preaches violence and conflict or militancy. All the religion advocates and preaches peace and peaceful co-existence of all citizens. In the religion of the Christian Jesus Christ is known and called, the prince of peace. He taught, commanded and demonstrated the significance of and his name will be called wonderful, counselor mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace (Isaiah 9: 6-7). The Bible also says: “Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another (Mark 9: 50). Furthermore, the Bible says: Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up building. (Romans 14:19)¹⁵ Throughout the Jesus earthly ministry, he demonstrated his love and maintained peace among all men. Despite stiff

opposition from the Pharisees, seduces and religious leaders, he never said any rude or insulting word to them. Even when he was arrested and Peter had to draw his sword to cut off the ear of the slave of the High Priest, Jesus cautioned Peter and replaces the ear. He was led to be crucified like a lamb that is dumb for he said no word to show the level to which he pursued peace.

Islam also calls for the quest for peace, tolerance and kindness which is a state of physical, mental, spiritual and social harmony. Other virtues of Islam are that Muslims are urged to be imbining the spirit of kindness and forgiveness. (Q23:96) attested to this, and Muslims are further urged to live in harmony and peace with all fellow human beings. Repel evil with that which is better. We are best knower with the thing the utter (Q 23: 96)¹⁸.

These values and virtues were practically demonstrated by the Holy prophet Muhammad (SAW). He used non-violent methods to resist those who persecuted him. He never resorted to violence or force unless for defensive mechanism. Peace making, negotiation and dialogue are considered more effective than aggression and violence confrontation. For instance, the virtue of tolerance and forgiveness as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) can be seen vividly when there was famine in Mecca and he helped them despite the fact that they had driven him out of his home. Similarly, after the conquest of Mecca, the people of Mecca expected the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to kill them all in retaliation, or take them salves or at least confiscate their property and belongings. They were extremely worried and wondered what declaration he was going to make at his historic address. However, he begins his address by saying to the pagans of Mecca: “Today there will be no blame on you for anything and no one will harm you anyway”¹⁹

There is no other such example in the history of mankind to show this excellent behavior towards the enemies. These are the type of behaviors expected from a good practicing Muslims.

Having examined the major religions, it could be seen that peace is of paramount importance to any meaningful development and religion can provide the needed peaceful atmosphere if used in the right perspective.

The Role of Religions in a Society

Religion permeates every aspects of man's existence in the universe, be it politics, social, cultural or economic life of the people. It has been used as the most important instrument in the social control of man and the society. It performs the social functions such as providing aims, purpose forms, defense and sense of direction. The role of religion in promoting peace security and eradicating the youth's militancy cannot be over emphasized.

1 Religion Stimulates Social Habits and Checks Anti- Social Behavior.

Religion is "an efficient means of social control, stimulates social habits and checks anti-social tendencies"²⁰. It offers the whole society a concept of its own sacred value. It prescribes a particular kind of behavior or conduct to its adherents in terms of knowledge, thinking, reflection decisions, choices, tastes, opinion, habits, feelings and freedom of actions. Such particular life styles are created, maintained and sustained through religions doctrines, ethics, and laws safe guards are prescribed against deviation from these life styles. Religion polishes and fashions morality in positive dimension. To neglect religion is to do away with morality, without religion moral development of the society will be meaningless.

2 Religion gives Emotional Security, Spiritual and Material Support.

Religion is an instrument for defense. It provides belief and attitudes that help to defend the people against vexing doubts, anxieties and aggression²¹. As

people do struggle with life of uncertainties, powerlessness and insecurity religion provides answer to the things that threaten people's life and survival. It was even noted that religion offers emotional, spiritual and material support to its members in times of tension, stress or hardship²². The poor and wretched ones are to be given alms or gifts from the rich ones among them. Victims of natural hazards or wars are to be aided and their life must protect as a sacred entity and peaceful coexistence of the society. Also religion offers resistance against frustration, hostility, suffering, anxiety, despair and hatred

3. Religion Reforms and Resettles Deviants

A deviant is person who is deficient in moral and social standards from what is normal and accepted. Religion can be used to call the out law persons or sinners back to repentance, and makes them become socially integrated into the society. Religion struggles with the ultimate problems of human life that deprive man from behaving in the morally and socially accepted ways. It gives a sense of direction and makes people to perceive, feel, think, act and behave in a specifically desired ways. It moves people a way from despair and restores confidence in them²³. Armed robbers, adulterers, drunkards, drug- addicts, law- breakers and frauds to mention a few have been changed to behave in a socially approved manners and society see and treat them with trust and confidence.

4. Religion Fosters Social Solidarity and Friendships.

Religion serves as a powerful means for the solidarity among its members and nearly all the great social institutions have been born in religion²⁴. Also, religion regulates social life of the society by creating some sort of order for its members to live together. Religion encourages solidarity, consensus, cordially, harmony, cooperation, unity, stability, security and peaceful co-existence. Religion creates several fellowship groups for the adults and youths alike. Out of these fellowships, friendships, marriage and brother hoods emerged²⁵. It allows the

adherents to coordinate their activities in submission to rules and regulations under the guidance of values, so that they can live harmoniously with their fellow human beings.

5. Religion helps to bring about Social Change.

A change takes place in religion as a social phenomenon. In Nigeria, religion helps to bring about social change. Social change has been described as the change that occurs in world views, ideas, values, beliefs, rules, relationships, institutions, symbols, speech, languages, style of thinking and behaviors and the means of production and distribution of goods and services²⁶. A social change is the alteration in the patterns of social action and interactions. Religion introduces and disseminates new ideas and information about education, medicine, literature, agriculture, games, markets, organization and administration. Religion brings about and establishes new forms of education, dressing, marriage, law courts and languages in Nigeria.

6. Religion Code of Ethics has an Economic Impetus

Religious ethics contributes to economic development. In religion, every career is viewed as a divine calling (vocation). Religious principles of honesty, prudence, industry, frugality, punctuality and justice in business, create freedom from fear of cheats and dupes, and offer a peaceful state for commercial progress. Religion encourages hard-work/industry, saving money and financial discipline, the diversion of business wealth to economically unproductive activities is discouraged, so there should be no laziness and extravagance that is necessary. Economic gains are to be spent in a manner that could give glory to God and for the benefit of mankind. Thus, if the economic relevance of religion in society can be appreciated, then there would be peace, security and development of the economy in Niger Delta. Religion influences economic decisions, motivation, skill and resources directly or indirectly.

7. The Relevance of Religion in Cultural Development.

Religion helps in transforming the society by introducing new cultural elements. Religious doctrines, laws organizations, modes of dressing, dogma, buildings, patterns of marriages, training of children, burying the dead and many other items of culture are influence through religion. Morality is used to give meaning and purpose to the cultural behavior. Wherein the culture deviates from the real religious meaning, then it has to be checked, so that there is balanced relationship between the cultural elements and religious ideology. Indecent modes of dress, is discouraged for the sake of modesty and moral implication given.

8. Religion Ensures the Retinues Existence of the Society.

The positive role of religion is to holding society together as a form of “social glue”²⁷. Religion serves as a social bond that holds the society together. It strengthens the basis belief and values of the society. It stresses for the social cohesion of all its members to live in unity and peace. Religious ceremonies are performed to remind people that they have a common history and identity, thereby ensuring the continuity for the existence of the society. There are events in the life of an individual and in the life of a society that point to the fact that God is working out this purpose for the common good of the individual and the society

Recommendations/Suggestions

The principal religions recognized in Nigeria are Islam Christianity and African Religion. Each of these has deep roles in eradicating youth militancy. First the religions must see the building of moral character. Also, religion is the passport to eternal life, hence man must endeavor to live a worthy life, doing good to God and fellow man, and at the end be justified to render good account of his stewardship²⁸.

Therefore, Religious Education should be thought as a core subject at all levels of educational system. This view is clearly stated in section (3) of the national policy on education²⁹ that

- (i) Respect for the worth and dignity of individuals
- (ii) Faith in man's ability to make rational decisions.
- (iii) Moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations
- (iv) Shared responsibility for the common good of society
- (v) Respect for the dignity of labor

All these virtues can only be achieved with the fear of God which the Bible says is the beginning of wisdom (Proverb 1: 7) while (Qur'an, 59: 18) also commanded to fear Allah in all Human activities. Thus religion as a subject should be made compulsory for students at all levels of educational system right from the primary up to the post secondary level. But toady it is an elective subject at the secondary schools neither is it made compulsory even for undergraduates taken courses other than religious studies. This idea should be corrected as all students in all institutions of learning irrespective of the level and choice of career are made to offer religious studies. Religious bodies too should endeavor to organize seminars, workshops and crusades on monthly basis in this area so as to totally wipe out youth militancy attitude from the Niger/Delta.

Religions leaders should as a matter of fact instill courage in to youth militants to denounce their militancy. The fear of being assassinated or tortured by youth militants should not bar him from taking such courageous stand.

Also, the religious role of the parents in curbing militancy among the youths needs to be emphasized. Parents are the first teachers from whose feet children learn. The family is the primary agent of socialization. Parents therefore have a great responsibility to inculcate moral values and religious education in to their

children³⁰. Also opines that the moral strength of a society essentially depends on the state of its families³¹.

Moreover, the Bible equally admonishes parents to teach their children the ways of God, so that when they grow they will depart from it. All these views point to the fact that parents have great responsibility a head of them in ensuring that, they inculcate into their children right from early stage of life good habits such as obedience, truthfulness, love, hard work and respect for elders and any constituted authority. When these are achieved, then they would have to contribute a great deal to the peace and security of the Niger Delta.

- (i) Through effective teaching of religions, moral and spiritual values by the Religions leaders that are required for the peace and stability of the Niger Delta.
- (ii) The youths should be educated on the need to shun militancy ideas violence
- (iii) The Bible and the Holy Qur'an which are the basis of Religious Studies emphasized all these communal expectations. It shows that Christianity and Islam are religions of harmony, unity and peace which Niger Delta would need for its growth and stability, these principles must be taught the more for the betterment of the youths in Niger/Delta.
- (iv) All the Muslims and Christians including youths should come together to combat the growing youths militancy causing menace in the Niger Delta.
- (v) The religious leaders must endeavor to solve the problem of unemployment turning to be a social vogue in Niger Delta, this might serve to be dignifying factor in the lives of youths.
- (vi) The youth could be molded through opportunity for them to be in politics without being partisan, which enable them to take cognizance of dignity of labor.

- (vii) The youths should be encouraged through teachings at schools, place or worship, homes to obliterate arrogance, lying, hatred,
- (viii) Oppression, bribery and corruption, intimidation, willful damage, vagabondage, embezzlements, cheating, stealing, robbery and the like.

Conclusion

The role of religious Education as a panacea to youth militancy in the Niger/Delta can not be over emphasized. However, much as we are all eager to see a virile society where peace, security and development reigns, this aspiration can be dream come to true if we all make conscious effort to see it happen. The Federal Government of Nigeria owes it a duty to re-introduce the teaching and learning of religious education in Nigerian Schools and make it compulsory for all students. Also, our political, social and religious leaders must make concrete efforts to see that peace reigns supreme throughout the Niger /delta region. However, religious bigotry should be stamped out and proper tenets of religious should be taught and practiced. As previously mentioned when religion is rightly handled it will be a solution to solve the incessant trouble posed by violence, confrontation and conflict in the Niger/Delta region in particular and in Nigeria in general. What is needed is an understanding of when and how to gingerly handles religion as a new bride to serve a positive purpose in the society.

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