

MANAGING ANGER IN THE NIGER DELTA OF NIGERIA: OLD TESTAMENT APPROACH

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Abstract

Modern psychologists view anger as a primary, natural, and mature emotion experienced by virtually all humans that has functional values for survival. Anger can mobilize psychological resources for corrective action. Uncontrolled anger can, however, negatively affect personal or social well-being. While many philosophers and writers have warned against the spontaneous and uncontrolled fits of anger, there has been disagreement over the intrinsic value of anger. Displays of anger can be used as a manipulative strategy for social influence. The aim of this paper is not to join issues with the different contenders but to look at the reason for the fury and dander, especially among the youths in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria and attempt theologico-biblical solutions. The paper highlights the moral issues involved in the Niger Delta crisis and points out a biblical pattern of how “risk bearers” can adequately, justly and equitably be compensated so that justice can be done justly and anger averted.

Introduction

At the 60th birthday of Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan, Governor of Delta State in Southern Nigeria, the issue of anger in the Niger Delta was brought to the lime light. The topic for the birthday lecture was, ironically, not on politics but on a subject in humanity – Anger and Its Management. Professor Benjamin Okaba and Bishop Mathew Kukah of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto in their respective lectures spoke at length on what causes anger, its expression and management. They captured the individual, domestic, and political angles to the causes of anger; the various ways people express it and the management of it which could be political (Anibeze & Ahon, 2014). These are no doubt salient points, but it is becoming clearer that the Niger Delta issue is far from over. The amnesty program of the Federal Government might have assuaged some nerves or oiled some palms⁵ but has not settled the issue of the people of Niger Delta. For instance we may ask what the problem of the Niger Delta people is.

Why the Anger?

In answering the question, what is the problem of the Niger Delta people, what do they want or why are they so angry? We can submit that the primary reasons are because, firstly, the people believe that injustice (צדק) has been done. This means they have received less than their due, that the sharing procedure has been unfair or perhaps, the whole system is biased in the interests of some, while pretending to serve the interests of all (Itebiye, 2006). Secondly, equity (משפט), the spirit and habit of fairness, justness, and right dealing of men or a system of jurisprudence collateral to and independent of law, whose objective is to render the administration of justice more complete by affording relief where necessary is missing. Thirdly, their land has either been taken from them or polluted and degraded. Fourthly, the fear of uncertainty about the future after the oil boom is becoming apparent. For instance:

1. Whereas every other state of the Federation has a Federal University, Polytechnic or College of Education, the two largest oil bearing states in the Niger Delta, Bayelsa and

Delta have no Federal University, Polytechnic or even College of Education (NDDC Master Plan, 2004).

2. Whereas most Local Government Headquarters are already connected to the national grid, Yenagoa, the state capital of Bayelsa, the largest oil bearing state (onshore and offshore combined) is still not connected by the Federal Government controlled Power Holding Company (Itebiye, 2006).
3. The only Federal road linking Warri, Yenagoa and Port Harcourt is a single-laned, narrow, windy road that is full of “*pot holes*” which can be described as “*a death trap*”. This is a far cry from what we have in Abuja and Lagos (NDDC Master Plan, 2004).
4. According to the World Bank report (1995), GNP per capita in the Niger Delta region is far below the national average of US\$280 despite the high population growth rate combined with severe habitable land constraints (NDDC Master Plan, 2004: 110).
5. Available figures show that there is one doctor per 82,000 people, rising to one doctor per 132,000 people in some areas, especially the rural areas. This is more than three times the national average of 40,000 people per doctor (Ibeanu, 2004).
6. Data also show that only 27% of people in the Delta have access to safe drinking water and about 30% of households have access to electricity, both of which are below the national averages of 31.7% and 33.6%, respectively. Similarly only 6% of the populations of the Niger Delta have access to telephones, while 70% have never used a telephone (Ibeanu, 2004: 16). In fact, Warri, the economic nerve centre of Delta state (the largest oil bearing state onshore) and host to Warri Refinery and Petro-chemical Company does not have a pipe borne water. The much published World Bank assisted project has long been abandoned. Most Local Government Headquarters in the Country have pipe borne water. There is no Local Government Headquarters in Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, and Kaduna that has no pipe borne water (NDDC Master Plan, 2004).
7. Apart from a Federal Trunk Road (earlier described above) that crosses Bayelsa State, “*the State has only 15 kilometers of tarred road*” (Ibeanu, 2004: 16). This is less than half of the total length of the 30 minutes’ drive 3rd mainland bridge in Lagos built with oil money (Ibeanu, 2004).
8. According to a World Bank study, in the urban areas of Rivers State the cost of living index of 783 is the highest in Nigeria. The national average index is put at about 450 (NDDC Master Plan, 2004: 110).
9. Unemployment in Port Harcourt, the premier city of the Delta, is as high as 30% (Ibeanu, 2004: 16). The national average is put at about 5% (NDDC Master Plan, 2004).
10. In addition to the absence of Federal Higher Institutions, access to primary and secondary education, central to remedying some of these social conditions, lags abysmally when compared to other parts of the country. While 76% of Nigerian children attend primary school, in the Niger Delta the figure drops appallingly to between 30% and 40% (Ibeanu, 2004: 16). In some states like Lagos, Ogun and Ondo, the figure is between 89 and 95% (NDDC Master Plan, 2004).

In other words, it is clear that the Old Testament concept of justice, equity and fair play have not been appropriately applied. In all honesty, these issues are still glaring in the Niger Delta. The amnesty program, pulsating as it seems, is at best a palliative measure that is still far from answering the question.

Managing Anger: The Biblical Approach

What is required to bring about peace in the Niger Delta therefore, as Okwueze (2003) would say, is to right the wrong. In other words, the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta may continue except justice, equity, fairness and good conscience are employed. But, on the other hand, can human warfare, in the name of struggle, ever bring about the much sort after justice, and ultimately, peace (Soremekun, 2004)? In addressing this question, we must be able to evaluate the concept of peace and justice in the Old Testament.

1. What does the Old Testament says Concerning Peace?

Isaiah 2:2-4 declares that *"The LORD will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."* This glorious vision of peace is found in two places in the Old Testament (there is a repetition in Micah 4:1-3). Its repetition lends emphasis to a central Old Testament concern for peace.

More examples can be cited. Isaiah 11:6-9 paints a symbolic picture of the harmonious coexistence of those who are enemies by nature:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Even if one regards as unlikely the theory that the animals were symbols of specific nations in the ancient world, it is still clear that the vision speaks of peace that extends beyond the animal world into the arena of politics and human relations. This same vision of peace also enjoys emphasis in the Old Testament by its repetition in Isaiah 65:25.

Zechariah 9:9-10 describes a vision of a victorious king who rides, not on a war horse, but on a donkey, an ancient symbol that implies a desire to rule with gentleness in the promotion of peace. *"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations"*. Therefore we can say Peace is a central concern of the Old Testament.

2. How Practicable is the concept of Peace without Justice in the Old Testament?

Peace in the Old Testament is closely associated with the establishment of justice. We see this in each of the visions of peace cited above. In Isaiah 2:2-4 (Mic. 4:1-3), the desired peace comes in the wake of the LORD rendering judgment and justice among the nations. *"He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many"* peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. The vision of peace in Isaiah 11:6-9 is preceded by a description of the ruler who will usher in this age of peace (verses 3-4). He will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, *with justice* he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay

the wicked. The idyllic peace envisioned in verses 6-9 comes in the wake of the wicked being slain in the course of establishing justice and righteousness (verse 4). The same is true for the king of peace in Zechariah 9:9-10. The ruler who comes in the proclamation of peace is, in verse 9, described as “righteous” (NIV) or “just” (KJV), and verse 8 describes the removal of evil oppressors.

Furthermore, in the messianic description of the prince of “peace” in Isaiah 9:6-7, Peace is inextricably linked to justice and righteousness:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

In other words, there is no peace where justice is ignored.

3. Is Human Warfare Regarded As A Solution In The Old Testament?

The Old Testament, however, is not naive. It warns that human injustice and cruelty are also expressed by the same agency. Thus, the passage which describes Assyria as God's instrument (Isa 10:5) also rebukes her for going beyond the intentions and purposes of God (Isa 10:7). 2 Samuel 21:2 implies that King Saul killed the Gibeonites out of “zeal for Israel and Judah”. However, Saul's act of zeal involved bloodshed and, in verse 1, is portrayed clearly as incurring God's wrath. Simeon and Levi take justice into their own hands, avenging the alleged rape of their sister Dinah (Gen 34) by the use of human deceit and violence. Their anger and violence are condemned in Genesis 49:5-7. Human force, even when exercised in the name of divine justice, is therefore fraught with the danger of human injustice.

Human force is not only inherently dangerous, it is also inherently “defiling”. This is probably the reason why Numbers 31:50 speaks of the soldiers needing to seek atonement. There is no obvious injustice or evil associated with the soldiers or warriors in Numbers 31. Instead, their act of war is explicitly described as being in the service of “the Lord's judgment on Midian” (verse 3). The war they fought is, according to the biblical narrator, a war sanctioned by God (verse 7). Yet, in the aftermath of this successful campaign in the name of God's justice, the officers and soldiers are considered “unclean” for a week (verse 19) and require “atonement before the LORD” (verse 50). Atonement is needed even though the war was sanctioned by God. Why is this so? Wong (2004: 62) believes that “These purification rules reminded Israel that the death of one's fellow men was a catastrophic disruption of God's creation, even though in some cases it was the Creator himself who demanded the execution of the sinner.”

In the same vein, Numbers 31 expresses “genuine ambivalence concerning the ethics of war. The cause is holy the war is ritualized, but the killing defiles” (Wong, 2004: 63). Thus as one enters war ritually one must exit with separation, cleansing, and sacrifices of atonement. The same ambivalence and inherent “uncleanness” of warfare in the Old Testament may be discerned in the example of King David. This ruler, “a man after God's own heart” (1 Sam 13:14), was also a man of many wars. David fought and won many battles in God's name and there is no indication that these wars were unjust or against the will of God. Yet, the reason he is disqualified from building a temple for God is twice attributed to his having shed blood in battle. But this word of the LORD came to me: “You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house

for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight" (1 Chr. 22:8). But God said to me, "You are not to build a house for my Name, because you are a warrior and have shed blood" (1 Chr. 28:3). The Old Testament, therefore, knows that human warfare is dangerous because it is often an expression of human cruelty and injustice. Even when it is undertaken in harmony with God's purposes, human warfare and bloodshed "defiles".

4. Peace or Pacifism?

The Old Testament champions the cause of peace and justice. It longs for the day when the world "*will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks*", when "*nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore*" (Isa 2:4; Mic. 4:3). The Old Testament glorifies a God "*who makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire*" (Ps 46:9). But this glorious day of peace has not yet been ushered in. Injustice and evil still abounds. Consequently, in the harsh realities of the Old Testament world, divine judgment is executed, on occasion, through the agency of human force. The use of such force, however, is recognized as being inherently dangerous and even defiling.

How might the danger and defilement of warfare be guarded against? In the words of Wong (2004:64) "*Pacifism and the rejection of human warfare is one obvious option.*" As we have seen, the total renunciation of human warfare and weaponry is a central part of the Old Testament vision of peace and justice (cf. Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3). However, this pacifist stance has to be evaluated in the light of each particular circumstance. Are peace and justice best served and best promoted by the renunciation of human force and human warfare? If so, then such renunciation is faithful to the Old Testament vision of peace. But on other occasions, it may be judged that pacifism allows the increase of injustice and evil to advance. In this situation, the renunciation of human force may be questioned. There is no peace if injustice thrives. The Old Testament vision is peace, not pacifism.

This does not, however, mean that the Old Testament gives preference to war over pacifism. The non-violent pacifist response is, therefore, the best way to halt the escalation of violence and convict the consciences of leaders in power. An example of this in the Old Testament is Elisha's counsel of restraint that led towards peace and reconciliation in 2 Kings 8:21-23).

The Old Testament on Injustice and Warfare

Therefore what help does the Old Testament offers in concerning injustice and warfare? Firstly, what help does the Old Testament offer against the problem of unjust and evil human motives inherent in the practice of war? Perhaps the attitude and fervent prayer of the Psalmist in Psalm 139 might serve as a paradigm. The Psalmist asks God to search his heart and to test his motives. He believes that his hatred of the enemy is justified. He believes that they are enemies of God's justice. "*They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies*" (verses 20-22). But the psalmist has a healthy suspicion of his own assessment of the enemy. He, therefore, begins and concludes by asking God to search his heart and to test his understanding. "*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*" (verses 23-24). He subjects what he believes to be his justified anger to the searching light of God's wisdom and knowledge. Every leader (tribal, youth, and group) who has the

unenviable task of deciding between war and pacifism (non-violent means) should do the same. Therefore, The Old Testament warns that human warfare often promotes, not divine justice, but human injustice.

Secondly, how might the Old Testament teaching on the “defiling” nature of warfare help us in addressing the complex Niger Delta problem? Let us suppose that a healthy suspicion of one’s own understanding has been scrutinized under the light of God’s searching Spirit, and let us suppose that we are still convinced that human warfare is a necessary action in the promotion of peace and justice. If human warfare is inherently defiling, then the adoption of it is inherently evil. There is no place for warfare and bloodshed in God’s vision of heaven on earth. Therefore, if war is deemed necessary, it should be understood as a necessary evil. If we engage in war, we are engaging in evil which is defiling and that too is injustice. The non-violent pacifist response is still the best way to convict the consciences of our leaders until justice is done.

The Way Forward:

הַמִּלְחָמָה תְּפִישׁוּ בִּינְיָאֵת הַמִּלְקוֹחַ וְחִצִּיתָ
הַיְצָאִים לְצָבָא וּבֵין כָּל־הָעֵדָה:

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Take the count of the booty that was taken, both of man and of beast, you and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers’ houses of the congregation; and divide the booty into two parts, between the warriors who went out to battle and the entire congregation.’” (Numbers 31: 25-27 [RSV]).

1. The first Hebrew word (וְחִצִּיתָ), translated here as “and divide” is different from the common Hebrew verb (בָּדַל) “to divide”. The New Jerusalem Bible translates it as “and you will then share out”. It is, therefore, an imperative, “you must divide”.

2. The second word (אֶת־הַמִּלְקוֹחַ) is actually a combination of two words (אֶת and הַמִּלְקוֹחַ). The word אֶת is “unrepresented in English” language and generally used to “point out more definitely the object of a verb or preposition” (New Strong, Hebrew, 1995: 15). It is therefore, used here, as in many cases, to point out the definite object of the statement. The other word הַמִּלְקוֹחַ (the object of the statement), translated by RSV as “the booty” actually refers to “the prey” (KJ) or “the spoil” (NJB). It can therefore be properly translated as the proceeds

3. The third word בֵּין is a preposition meaning “between” or “among”.

4. The next is a phrase (הַמִּלְחָמָה תְּפִישׁוּ) translated by RSV as “warriors”. There are actually two words here: הַמִּלְחָמָה, meaning “the battle” and תְּפִישׁוּ, meaning “ability to manipulate” or “skilled in”. The two words are rendered by the New American Version as, “those who took active part in the war”. In other words, those who bear the risk, the hazard bearers, those who exposed themselves to danger, peril, and death.

5. The next is again a phrase (הַיְצָאִים לְצָבָא) translated as “who went out to battle” can be properly translated as “by going out to combat” (NAV), because of the presence of the word צָאִים, which means “to arise” or “get up”.

6. The last words, וּבֵין כָּל־הָעֵדָה, (“and all the congregation”) can also be translated as “and the rest of the community” (NJV).

In other words, the verse can be properly translated as the New American Bible puts it, “then divide them evenly, giving half to those who took active part in the war by going out to combat, and half to the rest of the community.” Or as the Living Bible renders it, “then divide it into two parts. Half of it is for the men who were in the battle, and the other half is to be given to the people of Israel.” That is, and you shall (must) divide the prey (proceed) into two (equal) parts;

between those that took the war upon themselves (by bearing the risk of the war) and went out to do the battle, and the (rest of) the congregation.

Many have asked why God gave such an imperative order. We are told that “the warriors” who went to the battle were only 12 thousand, 1 thousand from each tribe (Numbers 31: 4) out of a possible population of 603,550 men of 20 years and above who are able to go to war (See Numbers 1: 20-43). The recommended sharing formula appears arbitrary. But Pett (2003: 45) observes that “the fact that the skilled men of war were specifically distinguished here confirms that they each received the larger portion as a reward for risking their lives in battle”.

Obitts (2003) suggests this to be the biblical example of casuistry. He defines casuistry as, “the art of applying moral laws, which tend to be general, to specific cases.” He argues that ever since Aristotle called attention to what he termed the need for equity, a method for deciding what is the right or wrong act in concrete situations has been an important part of the study of ethics”. He posits that God’s system of justice, which adheres strictly to moral values, involves casuistry and even argues that it is indeed “the goal of ethics”.

In his “The Harmony of the Law”, Bingham (2005) appears to agree with this but sees this and other moral instructions as part of the follow ups of the “Seventh Commandment” – in the Roman Catholic order - or “Eight” in the protestants (Walker and Shankar, 2005), which says, *לֹא תגנוב* (or “YOU MUST NOT STEAL”) (Exod. 20: 15). In his words, “*since charity is the end of the Law, we must seek the definition of theft from...the rule of charity, that every one’s rights should be safely preserved, and that none should do to another what he would not have done to himself*” (Bingham, 2005: 112). In other words, anything done without love and genuine concern for the other is stealing. Any arrangement that refuses to take into consideration the need of the most effected of any situation is a theft.

It follows, therefore, that thieves are not only those who secretly steal the property of others, but those also who seek for gain from the loss of others, accumulate wealth by unlawful practices, and are more devoted to their private advantage than to equity. Thus, in order that God may keep away His people from all fraudulent injustice, He uses the word theft, which all naturally abhor as disgraceful.

We must bear in mind also, as Bingham (2005) posits that in living justly, abstaining from all wrong-doing, we are not only satisfying God, but ourselves. This is, perhaps, God’s main purpose of placing mankind under mutual obligation to each other, “that they may seek to benefit, care for, and succour their neighbours”

Summary/Conclusion

From the above discussion, we can establish that:

1. There is a deep seated anger in the Niger Delta region and it is not just politically or economically oriented but more of a morally issue.
2. The anger is as a result of a perceived injustice.
3. The people’s cry of injustice is real, as the people and region that bears the burden of the main source of the Nation’s wealth remains the poorest or least developed.
4. Ecologically, the region is a difficult terrain that actually requires more attention.
5. The require attention is not given and what is given does not go to the source, as exemplified by the amnesty program of the Federal Government.
6. The writer believes that the problem can be solved if the Old Testament concept of Justice and Equity is rightly applied.

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