



CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGES OF VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA IN THE LIGHT OF AMOS 5:14-15

Bernard O. Itebiye

Adam Igibudu Christian Institute
(Affiliate of University of Port-Harcourt)
Emevor, Nigeria

Abstract

The insecurity challenges and violence in Nigeria have assumed an alarming and worrisome proportion that it requires a wider and multiple approaches to control. It has become, in an honest observation, not only a conflagration that threatens Nigeria's statehood, but an issue that truly necessitates a call for revival and reinforcement of moral values and virtues. The aim of this paper to argues for the need to revive and reinforce moral values and virtue, hinged on justice as prescribed in Amos 5:14-15, in the country. Exegetical and phenomenological analyses showed that the continued state of violence and insecurity constitutes a great threat to national integration. Moreover, it has not only created panic and fear but has also caused a grave damage to the industrial development in the nation. This work concludes that until the moral foundation, on which the Nigerian state is hinge, is regenerated and justice, as seen in Amos 5:14-15, becomes the moral compass of both the leaders and the led, the nation may be threading on the part of imperilment. The paper, therefore, suggests that the government should seek and imbibe the values/principles of justice and portray the willingness to govern by it for all to see. Moreover, Nigerians, young and old, should begin to emulate these virtues to guide their conduct, behaviour and social relations with others.

Keywords: Security, Insecurity, Violence, Injustice, Nigeria



Introduction

One of the foremost fundamental human rights of the people in any given society is the right to security. Thus, it is constantly provided for in the constitution of most sovereign nations, including Nigeria. In section 14 (2) (b) of the Nigerian 1999 constitution, it is plainly stated that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government.”

Although the problem of insecurity is not exclusive to Nigeria (Igbuzor, 2011), the challenges of insecurity and violence in Nigeria have assumed an alarming and worrisome proportion (Adegbami, 2013) that it requires a wider and multiple approaches to control (Egbule, 2019). It has become, in an honest observation, not only a conflagration that threatens Nigeria’s statehood, but an issue that truly necessitates a call for revival and reinforcement of moral values and virtues (Onifade, et al, 2013). Not only has the continued state of violence and insecurity threatened the very fabric of national integration in the country and created panic and fear, disquiet and anxiety, it has also caused a grave damage to industrial development of the nation (Adegbami, 2013). Onifade, et al (2013) quoting Imhonopi & Urim (2012), aptly captures the situation thus:

The insecurity challenge has assumed formidable dimensions forcing the country’s political and economic managers and, indeed the entire nation, to rue the loss of their loved ones, investments and absence of safety in most parts of the country. The number of violent crimes such as kidnappings, ritual killings, suicide bombings, religious killings, politically-motivated killing and violence, ethnic clashes, armed banditry and others has increasingly become the regular signature that characterizes life in Nigeria (p.53).

According to Egbule (2019), there are concrete evidences that depict injustice as a core contributor to the issue of insecurity in Nigeria. Its rippling effect is felt in our social institutions and communities. Its dismembering effect is felt in our revered cultural values and our overflowing love for one another. Its concomitant effect is evident in the collapse being experienced in various segments and sectors of our society which has brooded and hatched crimes of various natures and degrees.



This paper aims at, not just showing that injustice, among other issues, is the root cause of insecurity in Nigeria but that the nation (both the leaders and the led) should urgently see the need to seek for revival and reinforcement of moral values and virtue, hinged on justice as prescribed in Amos 5:14-15. In that consideration, seeking good (טו דרשוי) and not evil, as used by Prophet Amos, which can be broadly interpreted as justice (צדק), must become the moral compass of both the leaders and the led, in Nigeria, so that the nation may avoid walking on the precipice.

Violence in Human Nature

Violence is defined as the illegitimate and unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will or desires of other people in the society (Wolf, 1969). According to Wood (2017), humans precariously straddle two worlds. One world is based on our genetic hard-wiring which is geared towards survival and aggression. This he referred to as our animal instincts. Our other world is the modern, civilized society, based on rules and conformity which we have created and enjoy. The vast majority of people reside prominently in civilized society, and they dismiss their instinct for aggression and dominance. Being a part of the group ensures safety and prosperity, and the group strongly influences and defines individual behaviour.

This relationship between the group and the individual is a two-way street. The group defines rules and limitations, and the individual complies for the purpose of integration. The end result of this is mutually beneficial to the good of one and the well-being of many. Evil acts occur when one aspect of this system breaks down and either the motivations of the group as a whole become corrupted or an individual rebels against the norms created by society (Wood, 2017).

As a whole, we recognize evil acts as being those committed by individuals who have abandoned society. When the failure of good is on the side of the group as a whole, however, the result can be much different. If good people are subjected to degraded values within the group, even the best person can become subject to committing the worst acts. This is often highlighted in examples of heroes-turned-criminal in the military when officers find themselves on the wrong side of the law (Beland, 2005; Agrawal, 1998).

Violence and evil are no strangers to our world, and they are never going away. However, if we learn to recognize the sources of derelict behavior, we may be able to intervene and prevent good people from making tragic decisions.



Types and Causes of Insecurity in Nigeria

Insecurity in Nigeria can be categorized as Economic, Political, Social and religious. But the causes of insecurity in Nigeria include Corruption, Unemployment, Weak judicial System, high influx of arms, Terrorist threat, Failure of Parents and Religious leaders, Poor Response by Security Agents, Bad Leadership, Drug Abuse, Illiteracy Among the Youths, the porous nature of Nigeria's Borders, the non-Prosecution those who Threaten Peace, economic imbalance or Unfair Distribution of Wealth (Njoku, 2019; Ibenegbu, 2020).

The Prophet Amos

Like all biblical prophets, Amos spoke the oracles of Yahweh, Israel's God, to people in a particular context (Constable, 2021). In order to comprehend the theology of the book that bears his name, one must have a basic understanding of that context (Ellison, 1974).

According to Craigie (1982), the original recipients of Amos's message were the citizens of the northern kingdom of Israel in approximately 760 B.C. That Yahweh would call Amos to prophesy to them was, in itself, rather remarkable because he was neither a religious professional nor a northerner, but a farmer from Tekoa in Judah (Amos 1:1; 7:14-15). What this signified, to any who might be attuned to perceive it, was that Yahweh was not the sort of God who felt constrained by convention when choosing an individual for the task at hand, even if that person should appear to be unqualified (Eichrodt, 1967). His task for this layman from the south was that he travels to what was essentially a foreign country and speak a hard message to people living in relative ease.

Amos' Message to the Nation of Israel

Israel, during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753) was propelled to heights of power and prosperity unmatched since the days of David and Solomon. Many were buoyed by a sense of well-being and felt optimistic about the future. While the military was strong and the gross national product was high, however, the nation was in an advanced state of social, moral, and spiritual decay. Shocking extremes of privilege and powerlessness, wealth and want had emerged. Judges could be bribed. Religion was a syncretistic mix of ritualistic devotion to Yahweh and various pagan deities. The fact that Yahweh had to summon Amos to address this situation was a damning indictment of Israel's leaders, both religious and secular, who lacked the requisite ethical fiber. A notable exception was Hosea, whose denunciation of Israel's spiritual apostasy complemented Amos's devastating exposé of her tattered social and moral fabric.



As Feinberg (1948) opines, any discussion of the theology of the Book of Amos must begin with its portrait of Yahweh. One catches glimpses of many aspects of his character and activity. The three most prominent features of that portrait are his sovereignty, justice, and grace. Throughout the book, in utterances that contain a remarkable number of first-person singular forms, Yahweh indicates his sovereignty by repeatedly asserting that he initiates things. Events both past (2:9-11; 4:6-11; 9:7) and future (1:4-5; 2:13-16; 5:27; 6:14; 9:11-15) are not the products of chance but Yahweh's inventions. Furthermore, he reports effects, of which he himself is the cause, in advance of their occurrence (3:6-8).

The prophecy of Amos highlights two major spheres in which Yahweh manifests his sovereignty: nature and the nations. In some passages his lordship over nature is demonstrated in both his role as its creator (4:13; 5:8) and his harnessing of its awesome forces for his own purposes (4:6-11; 5:8-9; 7:1-6; 8:7-14; 9:5-6). These and other parts of the book (1:2; 3:8) reveal the great power and terrible majesty of the God with whom Israel must deal.

Yahweh also manifests his supreme authority over the nations. As might be expected, Amos shows that Yahweh is Israel's sovereign. It is he who elected or chose the people of Israel for a special covenant relationship with himself, who rescued them from slavery in Egypt, and who led them through the blistering wilderness to their territorial inheritance, which he wrested from the Amorites (2:9-10; 3:1-2; cf. Gen 15:12-16). Yahweh now declares that he will punish and disperse the present covenant community, which has been unfaithful to him (2:13; 3:14; 5:26-27). Ultimately, he will restore Israel (9:11-15).

However, insists Amos, Yahweh not only rules in Israel's affairs; he also controls the movements of other peoples (9:7), summons other nations to do his bidding (6:14), and judges other states in accordance with the standards he has set for them (1:3-2:3).

Amos 5:14, 15:

רַע-וְאֵלֶּךְ שׁוּבוּ לְטוֹב וְלִמְעַתְּחֵי וַיְהִי-כֵן אֶתְאֱלֹהֵי-צִבְאוֹת יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתֶּם:

טוֹב וְאֵלֶּךְ בְּשַׁעֲרוֹתָיִם טָמְאָה אוֹלֵי יִתְּנוּ שְׂאֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵי-צִבְאוֹת יְהוָה ס יוֹסֵף: שְׂנֹא-יֵרָע

Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.



Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph (RSV).

A person does not need to seek God if He has already revealed Himself to him. Thus, seek means "to turn" to Him in repentance, not necessarily "to look for." This is a way of saying, "Set aside your time and life for God." "Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate."

Seek in the Hebrew is imperative and has the force of a command. Seeking good, or seeking God (verse 4), is an act that we have to set ourselves to do; it is not a natural inclination (Romans 8:7). But it is worth the effort, for its product is life - not just physical existence, but life as God lives it (John 17:3). If we determine to seek good, and continue in it, the result will follow. Seeking the Lord produces godly life.

In living by every word of God, we should notice the order in which He lists these commands: "Seek good and not evil. . . Hate evil, love good." The action of turning to good precedes the emotions of hating evil and loving good. Holiness involves action and emotion: seeking and shunning, loving good and hating evil. He wants us to turn to the good and make it a target in our daily life. If we wait for God to infuse us with the right kind of feeling before we try to do good, then we will wait a long time because it will never come. We have to take action first by faith and the corresponding right feeling will follow.

If holiness does not involve both action and emotion, it becomes something that we can put on and take off. We could hypocritically live one kind of life during the week, and on the Sabbath put on our holy look and go to services. Action and emotion combine to make a whole way of life. Holiness is not just a way of life or a rule to live by. It also produces the very best quality of life - the way God lives eternally. God's people have to think constantly of holiness, appreciating that He has chosen us out of this world and given us grace to be holy.

Justice as an Act of Holiness

God's justice is a corollary to his holiness and righteousness attributes. Justice does not only reflect his very essence, he also expects it to distinguish those who name him as their God (Exod 19:5-6 ; Lev 11:44-45 ; 20:7 ; Amos 5:14-15 Amos 5:24). As already indicated, the basis on which Yahweh relates to the Israelites is his covenant with them. In that covenant he sets forth his expectations regarding the way in which they ought to relate to him and to each other.



These relationships are to be characterized by the sort of love that manifests itself in loyalty and faithfulness to him (Deut 6:4-14 ; Amos 5:4-6) and justice and compassion to their neighbours (Lev 19:9-18; Amos 5:15 Amos 5:24).

The Message of Amos to the Nigeria Society

The unfortunate thing is that when people are insecure, it can lead to several other things. Among others, people may find it difficult to trust one another thereby ignoring such critical issues as loyalty and faithfulness to God; and justice and compassion to neighbours. Consequently, Amos message can be applied to the violent and insecurity challenges confronting the Nigerian society in order to avert the impending. The solution seems simple and obvious. The Prophet outlined 3 steps. They are:

1. דַּרְשׁוּ-טוֹב רַע-וְאֵל ("Seek good and not evil"):

The action of turning to good goes with the emotions of hating evil. Doing good, therefore, involves both action and emotion: seeking and shunning, loving good and hating evil. Amos is saying that God wants us to turn to the good and make it a target in our daily life. We have to take action first by faith and the corresponding right feeling will follow.

2. שְׂנְאוּ-רָע טוֹב-וְאֵהָבוּ ("Hate the evil, and love the good"):

Evil is not only not to be sought, but to be hated, especially the evil of sin, because of its evil nature, and pernicious effects and consequences; and, if it was for no other reason but because it is hateful and abominable unto God, therefore they that love him should hate evil, even with a perfect hatred; as all good men do, though it is present with them, and cleaves unto them, and they do it, Psalm 97:10; and "good" is to be loved for its goodness' sake; and the good effects of it; a good God is to be loved, and all good men, and all good things; the good word of God, and his commands and ordinances; and highly to be esteemed, and affectionately regarded:

3. בִּשְׁעֵרֵהֶם יִשְׁפֹּט ("Establish judgment in the gate"):

openly, publicly, in every court of judicature, which used to be kept in the gates of cities; not only execute judgment and justice in all cases brought into court, but let it have its constant course, and be always practiced according to the settled laws of it. Let justice be done. And let it be seen to have been done. The importance of this kind of justice is not just to see that disputes are settled and crimes are checked, but would lead to the



reinstatement of the faith of the people on the governing system and provides motivation for them.

Confronting Violence and Insecurity in Nigeria

In confronting the twin issue of violence and insecurity, therefore, the words of the Prophet Amos can and should be given serious consideration. According to Onifade et al (2013), the violence and insecurity challenges in the Nigerian society are mainly consequent upon the unaddressed injustices that have cumulatively led to moral decadence. The growing dissatisfaction, discomfort and distress within the larger society coupled with the unabating official corruption, high unemployment rate, economic crisis, pauperization of the masses, decaying infrastructure and a futile national integration project are all reflections of the injustice in the Nigerian system that has heated up the socio-political environment. Furthermore, Onifade, et al (2013) posits thus:

The perception of marginalization by many Nigerians is informed by the ostentation showed by the political class and elite vis -à- vis the grinding poverty to which citizens are subjected. Even security has been bourgeoisie by the elite... the security of the Nigerian nation-state has been reduced to that of the ruler and his immediate supporters, thus, the security calculus of the Nigerian state has failed because it does not include vital aspects of social and national development supported by the provision of basic social, economic or even military conditions necessary for effective national security. This state of inequality, unfairness and injustice has toughened the people, forcing them to take their destiny into their hands (p. 55.)

Consequently, kidnapping, banditry, armed conflicts; terrorism, ethno-religious clashes, and other violent crimes have become the dominant themes of Nigerian social relations as a result of the perceived injustice by virtually every section and sector of the Nigerian society. The government may have made efforts to contain the insecurity and violence rampant in different parts of the country, but a careful analysis shows that from the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, the banditry in the North West, the unrest in the South South, the agitations in the South East to the Herdsmen Farmers conflicts in the North Centre, South West and other parts of



the Country, the recurrent tune everywhere is the cry for justice (Egbule, 2019). The injustice could be political (Babalola, 2014); social-religious or economical (NIREC, 2019).

Conclusion

In order to confront the seemingly unending issue of violence and insecurity in Nigeria, therefore, there is the need to revive and reinforce moral values and virtue, in the country, in the light of Amos 5:14, 15. The country should portray justice as being the foremost responsibility the Government owes the people.

This paper argues for the need to revive and reinforce moral values and virtue in the country and that the country should portrays justice as a foremost responsibility of Government. This work, therefore, is of the view that until the moral foundation, on which the Nigerian state is hinge, is regenerated and justice becomes the moral compass of both the leaders and the led, Nigeria may be walking on the precipice.

Recommendations

This research therefore suggest as follows:

- (a.) the government should imbibe values/principles and portray the willingness to govern by justice for all to see.
- (b.) Nigerians, young and old, can and should begin to emulate these virtues to guide their conduct, behaviour and social relations with others.
- (c.) Government should be conscious that it carries a moral burden to lead by example. Every government official should be willing to provide moral leadership that depicts justice to all.
- (d.) Government should take the lead in propelling the citizenry to eschew evil, corruption, vices, inequity, injustice and wickedness and compel the people to model the character of their leaders and vice versa.



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