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## **Kidnapping: A Threat to the Survival and Stability of the Church in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The Church whose prophetic vocation is the extension and implementation of the mission of God in the world (Nigeria) is currently being challenged by incessant kidnappings which cut across all institutions and all classes of people including students some of which are tortured, killed or left with serious traumatic experiences. The primary purpose of this paper is to address the menace of kidnapping as a prevailing security challenge and how the church can continue to be relevant in this kind of environment. This paper adopted the use of primary sources which highlighted available relevant literature including current media report through which Nigeria's horrific situation is laid bare. Engaging the functionalist perspective of deviant approach and the Marxist view on crime, this paper argues that unequal opportunities for the citizenry to realize their potentials brings about what Merton calls innovation which sums up the reason for resorting to other means (kidnapping). This paper further argues that, the fact that critical institutions including the church are languishing under the very watch of the Government whose primary responsibility is to protect lives and properties of the citizens clearly demonstrates that the nation (Nigeria) is at war with itself. Many have written on insecurity (kidnapping) bedeviling our Nation but have however, paid little attention on how the church is somewhat affected. The research reveals among others that kidnapping affects the church in the aspect of reaching out (evangelism), and because some of the leaders and members of the church are held hostage or killed, the Christian populace are like sheep without a shepherd/shepherd without the sheep. This paper therefore recommends among others that the church should remain true/faithful to its calling, unite and not be divided against itself and Government should employ and equip more security personnel to be stationed permanently in churches and schools.

**Keywords:** Kidnapping; Church; Nigeria.

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## **1. Introduction**

Modern Nigeria is bedeviled with series of security challenges ranging from ethno religious conflicts, farmers/herders clashes, insurgency, and banditry among several others. While this is going on, the horrors of kidnapping is also going on a daily basis [1]. In fact, the print and electronic media are filled with news of several kidnappings across the nation. This act which has become synonymous with the Nigerian State is found in every nook and cranny of the country invariably affecting all classes of people; young and old, rich and poor, politicians and clergy. This is sending shivers down the spines of politicians, the media, business men and women, farmers, religious organizations, the educational sector and indeed all Nigerians. As Oyewole [2] puts it, this act has “become the most pervasive and intractable violent crime in the country”. According to a report [3], over 618 schools have so far been shot down in five states of the North and more than 8000 Nigerians are currently held hostage by kidnapers and bandits. This menace which has undoubtedly punctuated Nigeria is increasingly threatening its growth and development. Because of this, the Minister of Interior, Rauf Aregbesola at a security meeting said “we are all at risk” [4]. This security challenge is raising serious concern especially on our nation’s integrity and stability; the bedrock upon which any meaningful growth and development is achieved. In Nigeria today, virtually all institutions languish as a result of series of security threats. Sadly, the church, which to a large extent is contributing to the growth and development of Nigeria through its mission, is currently being challenged by incessant cases of kidnapping of its members across the country. This act which is against the laws of the land has left many traumatized and some killed; the effect on the Church is great. While the Church struggles to survive, the situation worsens by the day because Government, whose primary role is to protect lives and properties of the citizenry, does not seem to exhibit full capacity in the discharge of its duty. This further demonstrates its lack of zeal to reach the zenith of what it claims and wants to be. As put forward by [5], the nation has become “a massive killing field as both government and the governed look on helplessly”. This paper is aimed at addressing the menace of kidnapping as a security challenge and how the church can continue to live and be relevant in an environment that is jeopardizing its effort. It argues that since the critical institutions that are expected to drive Nigeria to greatness are collapsing under the very watch of Nigerians, it means that Nigeria is at war with itself. The paper further argues that kidnapping for whatever reason (political, financial, rituals) is a threat to the survival of the church and that Government’s inability to live up to its calling in protecting the citizenry and creating equal opportunities has yielded several crimes including kidnapping. This paper also argues that though there are several threats to the survival and stability of the church, kidnapping (insecurity) is no doubt a major one. This paper also uses the voices of some Christian religious leaders who might have at one point or the other raised their voices on the issue in question as the voice of the church. Structurally, the paper is organized into the following sections; the first part of the paper offers a conceptual clarification regarding the term kidnapping. The second section offers a methodological approach through which the paper will adopt in its analysis. The next section brings to fore the theoretical approach adopted by the paper. The fourth, fifth, and sixth sections will focus on the causes of kidnapping, a brief historical anecdote regarding the evolution of kidnapping in Nigeria, and the menace of kidnapping and its consequential effect on the church. The last section of the paper heralds the conclusion and, recommendations on how the church, the Nigerian government and other relevant stakeholders, will address the challenge of insecurity and kidnapping in the country.

### **1.1. Defining Kidnapping**

The Oxford English Dictionary [6] defines kidnapping as an act of snatching, seizing, and stealing a person by illegal force. It is an act of seizing a person against his or her will by force. Samaha [7] defines kidnapping as "taking and carrying away another person with the intent to deprive that person of personal liberty". Oyewole [2] on his part defines kidnapping as "the unlawful detention of a person through the use of force, threats, fraud or enticement, with purposes ranging from an illicit gain, economic or material, in exchange for liberation, or pressuring someone into doing something". Kidnapping in modern times is to extort ransom and in biblical times, this act was punishable by death (Exodus 21: 16) [8]. From the foregoing, it could be observed that kidnapping is a criminal act that constitutes a threat to the growth and development of Nigeria because the person who is forcefully taken is denied his right to personal liberty which directly denies him/her opportunity to contribute to the growth and development of the country.

### **1.2. Methodology**

To understand how the menace of kidnapping constitutes a threat to the survival and stability of the church in Nigeria, this paper engages the use of primary sources that are relevant to the study including the Nigeria watch database which maps out the trends of kidnappings in Nigeria. This method sought to highlight available relevant literature including current media reports on kidnapping in Nigeria and how it is challenging the survival and stability of the church in Nigeria. All these fall within the narrative way of presenting information concerning the Nigerian reality. This method is adopted because it will lay bare Nigeria's horrific situation.

## **2. Theoretical Discourse**

In an attempt to discuss the rampant cases of kidnapping in Nigeria and how it constitutes a threat to the survival and stability of the church in Nigeria, the research has adopted both the functionalist perspective of deviance approach and Marxists view of crime as a natural "outgrowth" of capitalist society. The functionalist perspective looks for the source of deviance in the way society is structured rather than in the individual. Merton [9] argues that deviant behavior (such as kidnapping) is a result of the culture and structure of the society itself. That is to say how members of the society are differently positioned in the social structure and not given equal opportunity to realize their potentials brings about pressure for social deviant behavior. Deviant acts in Nigeria could be enshrined in the nature of the Nigerian society. [9] Further mentions innovation which rejects normative means of achieving success and turns to deviant means, in particular crime. He argues that members of the lower social strata are most likely to select this route (Kidnapping) to succeed. This is typical of Nigeria where the lower social strata seem to be the ones that are mostly involved in crime (kidnapping). And because the Nigerian society has negatively dealt with them by not giving them equal opportunity, their educational qualification is usually low; Jobs provide little opportunity for advancement. It has been emphasized [9] that they have "little access to conventional and legitimate means for becoming successful". This could explain the reason for resorting to other means (kidnapping) which this paper argues is jeopardizing the mission of the church. Using the USA goal of success analysis [9], the American dream states that "all members of society have an equal opportunity of achieving success" through educational qualifications, talent, hard work, determination, and

ambition. But where importance is not given to the acceptable ways of achieving success, society becomes unstable and unbalanced. So in a situation where norms no longer direct behavior, deviance is encouraged. A critical analysis would indicate that this is exactly the case in the Nigerian crime situation where educational qualification, talent, hard work, etc are relegated to the background. This of course may explain the rationale behind the menace of kidnapping in Nigeria. Since rules cease to operate, the situation currently being experienced in Nigeria is encouraged because importance is not given to the acceptable ways of achieving success thereby paving way for people to engage in kidnapping as a shortcut/way of making it by all means. Ugwuoke [10] rightly puts this better when he said “In Nigeria where everybody is desperate to become rich overnight, innovative methods have become the shortest cut to wealth. Such deviant strategies include; bribery and corruption, embezzlement, robbery, kidnapping for financial purposes and all forms of fraud”. Members of Nigerian society are simply conforming to what the society has put in place. Lea and Young [11] argue that “marginal groups in society are particularly prone to the use of violence and riots as a form of political action.” Going further [11] emphasized that many Marxists see crime as a natural “outgrowth” of capitalist society where maximization of profit, accumulation of wealth, personal gain rather than collective well-being is encouraged. Mutual aid and cooperation for the betterment of all are discouraged in favor of individual achievements. This perfectly describes Nigeria’s present reality where like a capitalist society, wealth and the means of production are concentrated in the hands of a microscopic few, thereby generating a lot of low-income people/regions. The fact that there are cases of kidnapping in every nook and cranny of Nigeria explains the rate at which modern Nigeria is littered with low-income people. This could lead to frustration by the oppressed majority from among whom crimes are perpetrated as a way of getting their share of the national cake. Chamblis [12] rightly argues in line with the above when he said “greed, self-interest, and hostility generated by the capitalist system motivate many crimes at all levels within the society”.

### **3. Causes of Kidnapping**

From the theoretical underpinning, many Nigerians would agree that an unequal opportunity engendered by the structure of modern Nigeria is the root cause of violent crimes such as armed robbery and kidnapping. This happens when educational qualifications, hard work, talent among others are relegated to the background. Greed, which is an excessive desire for more, is also a factor that has put so much wealth in the hands of few thereby making majorities of the Nigerian populace poor. Obijiofor [13] documented that when people analyze the causes of growing cases of kidnapping in Nigeria, “they point to factors such as greed, poverty, high level of unemployment, social injustice, political apathy, to the basic needs of the poor as well as failed economic policies.” *Similarly, [14] identified abject poverty, corruption, fraud, political influence, joblessness, terrorism, lack of capital punishment by the government, and quick-money syndrome as causes of kidnapping in Nigeria. For example, poor people, jobless/unemployed could engage in this heinous crime to enrich themselves. This sums up what [14] called a quick-money syndrome. Politicians could also do the same to frustrate their opponents to remain in power or to misbalance them financially. These were experiences in Nigeria where Christ Ngige of Anambra State a sitting governor was abducted in 2003 [15] and many politicians numerous to mention. Furthermore, terrorist groups in Nigeria such Boko Haram, ISWAP, and Bandits have all resorted to this act as a way of getting funds to finance their activities and frustrate the effort of the Government in combating crime. Evidence of this could be seen in the series of abductions in the North East and Northwestern*

*parts of Nigeria by the aforementioned terrorist groups.*

#### **4. A Brief overview of kidnapping In Nigeria**

The rate of kidnapping in Nigeria is unprecedented. The high level of this heinous act has been decried by many individuals and groups. Statistically, Nigeria records more than 1,000 kidnapping incidents a year with many that are undoubtedly unrecorded by the media [16]. This menace according to [7] first attracted national attention in Nigeria on 25th February 2006 when some youths of the Niger Delta kidnapped some foreign oil workers as a way of pressing home their demand for restitution and increasing infrastructural development within the region. Since then, this deadly act which [1] referred to as “terror activities” has evolved to be a security challenge in Nigeria which “has not only become ubiquitous, it has been shamelessly commercialized in different parts of the country” [7] with the rich, the poor, males and females, the aged, children and infants at the receiving end. Commenting on how religious crisis seemed to have defied solution, the Adamawa State Governor Ahmadu Fintiri attributed the high rate of terrorism, kidnapping, and armed banditry bedeviling the North as an offshoot of the 1980s Maitatsene religious uprising that rocked almost all the states in the North [17]. On his part, the chairman of the Nigerian Governors forum Kayode Fayeme said that there is a correlation between insurgency in the Northeastern part of the country and banditry, as well as kidnapping in the North West and southwest respectively, and that kidnapping, has become a source of raising funds to support/promote insurgency in the North East [18]. *In Nigeria today, people are kidnapped for several reasons. However, kidnapping for ransom is more dominant. The case of Owe Opkaka, a Driver at Zenith Bank in Warri, and his friend who admitted receiving the sum of N50m as ransom between October 2020 and February 2021 in three kidnappings including the abduction, of some of their branch Managers [19] are one out of many cases. This dubious act has in recent times taken another dimension with numerous school children as victims of this unending abduction particularly, in the North West and North Central parts of the country. Of particular concern was the April 15, 2014 kidnap of 276 schoolgirls (mostly Christians) in Chibok Borno State; the February 19, 2018 kidnap of 110 schoolgirls in Dapchi Yobe State [19]. The kidnapping continued with the December 11, 2020 kidnap of over 300 schoolboys in Kankara Katsina State. On February 19, 2021, the nightmare continued as the media was greeted with the news of the abduction of 27 schoolboys along with their teachers in Kagara, Niger State. It was reported that at least one student was killed [2]. The February 26, 2021 kidnap of 279 schoolgirls in Jangebe, Zamfara State, the March 12, 2021 kidnap of over 30 students of Federal College of Forestry in Kaduna, and perhaps the last one that took place at the Greenfield University in Kaduna on April 20, 2021, with some of the victims reportedly killed is horrific [19]. This menace which has become endemic has recently led to several calls to security agencies to synergize to curb it.*

#### **5. The Church and the menace of Kidnapping In Nigeria**

To begin with, the English word “Church” comes ultimately from the Greek, *ekklesia* which refers to any assembly, local bodies of believers, or the universal body of all believers. As the covenant community whose nature can be seen in the accountability of believers, the New Testament refers to the church as “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim 3: 15). In its designation as the body of Christ, Jesus is its head [20]. The church therefore, is responsible for bringing the ‘good news’ in all its fullness; reconciling men to God, restoring

communities and promoting social justice [21]. From the foregoing it is clear that “the Church does not exist for itself but for the discharge of a commission” [22] which are encapsulated in Jesus’ parting command to his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:16-20). This commission further makes it clear that the church as “social and religious institutions in the society that has both the divine mandate and the social responsibility to preach the good news and make disciples of all people” [23] is to transform lives of the citizenry. And as an agent of social change, the church has a prophetic vocation which “is the extension and implementation of the mission of God in the world” (Nigeria) [24], and this engages the political, social and economic life of the nation [23]. Unfortunately, this is being jeopardized by the kidnapping of its large human resources (members) who exceed any employer of labor including the Government [25]. The high rate of kidnapping particularly, what [1] refer to as a “religious-oriented model of kidnapping which targets church leaders and their faithful” is making it difficult for the church to carry out its mandate. This is because Government has not provided a level playing ground security-wise for the church to contribute its quota. According to [24], “the church and state share a complementary relationship where the state makes sure that the society is outwardly peaceful for the church to carry out her mandate of proclaiming the Lordship of Christ”. The enormous finances of the church are drained as ransom is always demanded. According to findings by Daily Trust, no fewer than 33 clerics were kidnapped in 2016 alone with over N700m demanded as ransom. On Sep 25, 2015, Venerable J.B Lawson and Venerable Isobo Dokubo of the African Church were kidnapped in Portharcourt with millions of naira demanded as a ransom [26]. On March 21, 2016, the Rev. Emmanuel Dzigau (President of the United Church of Christ in Nigeria also known as HEKAN), Rev. Yakubu Dzarma, and Rev. Iliya Anto were kidnapped along the Kaduna-Abuja expressway. It was however reported that while Dzigau and Dzarma regained their freedom, Anto who was HEKAN’s Vice President was found dead [27]. On January 8, 2020, Michael Nnadi a Seminarian in Kakau, Kaduna State was kidnapped and killed even after the payment of ransom. In an interview with the Catholic Charity Aid to the Church in Need on January 31, 2020, Archbishop Augustine Akubeze of Benin city, said: “attacks against Christians are due to lack of security in the country”. The Bishop also denounced the January 20, 2020 beheading of Pastor Lawan Andima who was Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Michika, Adamawa State [28]. On May 15, 2020, 3 Missionaries of the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) were kidnapped in a mission field in Niger, with a ransom of N5m each paid for their release [29]. On October 19, 2020, Rev. Polycarp Zongo of the same church was kidnapped [30]. On 28 March 2021, 8 RCCG members were kidnapped in Kaduna [31]. While some of the victims of kidnap in various parts of the country lost their lives in the process, others who regained freedom have been subjugated to various degrees of injuries and post-traumatic stress. More specifically, kidnapping in Nigeria has affected the church in the following ways:

- Finances: many churches have to pay ransom for the release of their kidnapped Pastors and also contribute significantly to the release of their members. This is draining the church of its finances, and creating poverty among its members who are mostly poor which Gwamna [32] sees as “constituting a majority of the people, in physical, social and religious schemes of things”.
- Reaching out: the Christian mission hovers much around the imperative Go! (Matthew 28: 19-20). This menace scares Christians from fulfilling this commission as several mission fields have been closed down and several others have not been visited by Churches/ Christian denominations that founded them. For instance,

some mission stations in Shiroro, Warrari in Niger and parts of Kebbi State founded by the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) have been closed down because of the continuous kidnapping of its Missionaries.

- Conversion to other Faiths: Some victims of kidnapping in Nigeria are forced to convert to other faiths. This is evident in the case of Leah Shu'ibu being the only one in captivity out of 109 of her schoolmates who were abducted the same day. It is reported that her still being in captivity for three years is simply because she refused to renounce Christianity [33].
- Sheep without shepherd/shepherd without the sheep: the Christian mission is founded on the principle of care on the part of religious leaders. But since Christian Leaders/Pastors are kidnapped and even killed by their captors, the Christian populace (the sheep) is without Shepherd. And where the sheep are the victim, Shepherds (Pastors) are left without the Sheep.
- Resorting to non-Christian ways of protection: the rampant cases of kidnapping of Pastors and members of the church in Nigeria have raised the question of God's power to protect his own. The daily rise in this criminal activity has led many Christians to resort to non-Christian ways of protection thereby jeopardizing their God-given mission. On what the church can do in a situation like this, Archbishop John Onaiyekan in an interview granted him by Tell Magazine on February 7, 2005, [34] said "the clergy and the church cannot afford to stand aloof when issues affecting the stability of the country are at stake". He condemned the way the people at the helms of affairs were accumulating wealth, while their people suffer [34]. In the light of this, [5] adds, "The greatest tragedy is the death of empathy from those in power..... When kidnapped and killed, victims and their families are left to their wits, crying and burying their loved ones alone". In a separate response to the incessant killings and kidnappings across the country, [5] further blames those in power for Nigeria's woes; accusing them of paying more attention to rehabilitating bandits and kidnappers than the victims who may constitute a reasonable percentage of the Church population. In his "Before Our Glory Departs" Easter message of 2021, [5] expressed concern over what he termed "the helplessness of the citizens who are "taunted by Boko Haram, ravaged by bandits, kidnappers, armed robbers, and other merchants of death across the nation. He added that there is a collective fear as to whether Nigeria's glory is about to depart". Nigeria has, according to [5], become a den of kidnappers whose acts daily traumatizes who would be tomorrow's parents, military generals, top security men and women, governors, senators, and ministers. It would suffice to say that people who are traumatized are to some extent psychologically unsettled to unleash their potential in building Nigeria. In its response to the insecurity bedeviling our Nation, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) describes the high rate of kidnappings as unfortunate, and the fact that the Kankara kidnap incident happened when President Muhammadu Buhari was in his home state sends a strong warning that the security architecture of the country has been compromised under his watch [35]. In a statement signed by the special assistant media and communication to the CAN President Pastor Adebayo Oladeji, the President said "the country is almost becoming a failed nation. Kidnapping has reached unimaginable proportions with no clue to it from the security agents. Victims' relatives and friends are being left at the mercy of the kidnappers as they bargain for the release of their people as if they are commodities put out for sale" [35]. In a similar response, the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) in a communiqué issued at the end of its 97<sup>th</sup> General Church Council meeting in Jos decried the frequency and widespread coverage of kidnappings and attacks on innocent villagers being witnessed in the country as alarming and very disturbing. The church expressed concern about the Government's lack of taking any cogent approach in addressing the menace [36].



## **6. Conclusion**

Even though the security situation in Nigeria particularly kidnappings is increasing by the day and jeopardizing the nation's growth and development, the Church in Nigeria which has since been existing by the grace of God for the glory of God can continue to be relevant if only it rises to its calling and endure hardship. The Lord who built his Church and gave it authority to build and to plant, to destroy and overthrow has also promised to be with it in the discharge of its commission through the ages and in all situations and that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Mathew 16: 16-20, 28: 16-20).

## **7. Recommendations**

To curb kidnapping and for the Church to continue to be relevant in an environment that is horrific such as Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The Church should remain true to its calling; that is faithful to its missionary obligation by positively engaging the world and making disciples of all Nations (Mathew 28: 16-20). Thus, the Church needs not to compromise in any way because it is the salt and the light of the world (Mathew 5: 13-14). A closer look at the number of Christians in Nigeria and the high rate of crime shows that what is popular is a religious expression of Christianity and not the true Church. This is evident in the recent report of the Corruption Perception Index 2020 published by Transparency International which indicates that Nigeria is now the 2nd most corrupt country in West Africa [37] even though it has the largest Christian population in the whole of Africa.
- The Church should teach members to be content with what they have so that they do not abandon the little they are doing for a deviant way of getting money (Kidnapping). When some soldiers asked John the Baptist at the bank of the Jordan what they could do, he replied, "Don't extort money and do not accuse people falsely - be content with your pay (Luke 3: 14-15).
- Since security is everybody's business, the Church should through its leadership engage relevant security agencies to create awareness among its members about the magnitude of kidnapping so that they understand some strategies kidnappers and the like may use to harm them. They should also be able to report any signal that may constitute a security threat. This would help members to be proactive and not always being reactive.
- The Church should through its divine power prevail over its members (particularly politicians) who are highly placed and could in one way or the other influence positive change for equal opportunity to pave way for more engagement, thereby reducing the rate of crime (kidnapping)
- The Church should look inward and withdraw arms against itself. These arms are bordering on the question of the unity of the Church and also cases where members or Pastors mastermind their kidnap. [1] decried that "it is no longer news that people are kidnapped in the Church. In worst-case scenarios, Pastors and children of Church leaders have even come together to aid such forms of kidnapping"; the Church is at war with itself. On the question of proving his authority, Jesus knowing their thoughts said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall" (Luke 11: 17). When the church gets rid of its catarrh then she can speak out courageously without fear of intimidation otherwise she cannot remain calm.



- Since the education sector through which the Church is also contributing its quota is currently being challenged by incessant kidnappings, Government should employ and equip more security personnel to be stationed permanently in our churches and schools to scare away perpetrators of crime, otherwise, the recent approval of 20 new private Universities, some of which are owned by churches is an exercise in futility.

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