

Testimonies of Shame and Anger in Northern Nigeria: Towards Protecting the Dignity of the Child



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INTRODUCTION

The theology of the Trinity is the apex of Christian revelation. This is closely followed by the theology of Incarnation, which focuses on God's entry into human history. The incarnation of the divine word as a human person, with the experience of childhood, underscores the dignity of the child to be preserved and protected. Given the situation of a possible violation, Joseph protected the Child Jesus from the wrath of Herod by fleeing to Egypt for safety (Mt.2:13-15). Every child has pride of place in the family and community, and protecting the dignity of the child is the responsibility of both the parents and the community. The current situation of terrorism in some parts of Northern Nigeria indicates a violation of the dignity of the child.

Drawing from the incarnation as a ground for theological discourse on childhood, this chapter presents testimonies of shame and anger in Northern Nigeria to show the violation of the dignity of children. This article employs a historical-analytical methodology to account for the experiences of violence towards children in Northern Nigeria. It begins with a synopsis of the rich value of the child in African culture. It then moves on to presents an overview of the impact of terrorism on children in Northern Nigeria. Finally, the essay proposes recommendations rooted in the humility and dignity of the child for the Catholic church in Nigeria. In this final section, the essay considers education as a paradigm in preserving the dignity of the child. This essay contends that a child is a divine gift that must be protected by the church irrespective of tribe and creed.

The Dignity of the African Child

Marriage, in Africa, is viewed as sacred, especially with the prospects of procreation. The Africans value the seed of the union of a man and a woman since it yields new life through the gifts of children.¹ From this African worldview, the birth of every child is considered a blessing for parents and the community. Children are considered gifts of God and invaluable treasures that must be preserved, protected, valued, and respected by the family.² In the Post-Synodal Exhortation of the first Special Assembly for the Bishops of Africa, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II acknowledged and appreciated the homogeneous cultural value that give welcomes the gift of children with gratitude and celebration. The pope wrote: "In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God. 'The sons and daughters of African love life.'³

In the family, therefore, the birth of a child is welcomed with multiple celebrations and often demonstrated in child blessing rituals and naming ceremonies. These childbirth ceremonies are rituals of thanksgiving to God for the gift and safe delivery of the child. Particularly, in the naming traditions, parents and the immediate family name their children in the light of the circumstances surrounding the birth of their children and as a symbolic expression of gratitude to God. This largely accounts for why African traditional names express a divine attribute as well as tell the birth story of the child. Above all, names given to a child honor God and divine life. Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator explains that in Africa when parents "name their children, it was in honour of *osanobua*, the Supreme Being, the author of life and the creator of the universe."⁴ In other words, naming ceremonies express the dignity, identity, and history of the child.

The intrinsic value accorded the child in Africa is similar to Northern Nigeria's cultural context. For the people of Northern Nigeria, great value is bestowed upon marriage, childbirth, and child upbringing.⁵ For instance, among the Hausa, Bajju, Gbagi, Ikulu, and Ogorok cultural communities, the birth of a child is welcomed with a celebration that demands that a goat or cow be slaughtered as part of a thanksgiving ritual. Often, between the sixth and eighth day, the child is named in a ceremony that involves

¹ Shabayang, "Love Made Fruitful," 199.

² See Shabayang, "Love Made Fruitful," 198-225.

³ John Paul II, "*Ecclesia in Africa*," no 43.

⁴ Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 12.

⁵ Philip and Teune, "*The Integrative Process*," 5-6.

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members of the family and the immediate community. It is believed that the name given to the child by the parents expresses gratitude to God and will have a significant influence on the child's life. These ceremonies are followed by the nurturing and training of the child by the parents. Children are cared for and socialized into the community by the parents and encouraged to preserve the good name of the family, learn from their parent's trade, and may be sent to school to acquire formal education. This is a demanding phase for parents. Yet beyond this difficult task of upbringing a child, Richard Rwiza recognizes a deeper challenge that needs to be realistically faced is overcoming societal challenges.⁶ It means parents must overcome challenges associated with child upbringing in their locality. In Northern Nigeria, due to terrorism, these challenges include the abuse of alcohol and drugs, rape, random killings, kidnapping, and rape. Terrorism has made children become child soldiers, sex workers, drug dealers, and displaced persons in camps and orphanages.

These social challenges deprive children of proper upbringing and formal education as well as a realisation of their dreams. In the words of Pope Francis: "The real question then is not where our children are physically, or whom they are with any given time, but rather where they are existentially where they stand in terms of their convictions, goals, desires and dreams."⁷ However, the good news must be proclaimed that God loves children— "Let the Children come to me...for unto them, the Kingdom of God belongs" (Mk 10:13-16).

Terrorism and Children in Northern Nigeria

Terrorism is considered as an act of war.⁸ This is because terrorism often involves extreme violence motivated by factors including political, religious, and ideological inflicted by one ethnic or religious group against another group or the state. Terrorism in Northern Nigeria has a political and religious dimensional motif that has led to insurgency, violence, and death in communities.⁹ However, Oladimeji Osewa explains that religious extremism is a significant cause of terrorism in Nigeria.¹⁰ In Northern Nigeria, religion is the driving force in breeding terrorist tendencies because of its penchant for labeling one group as superior and others as inferior based on a false monopoly of true worship to the supreme God.¹¹ Terrorist groups, therefore, propagate the supremacy of Islam and categorize non-Muslims as pagans (*kafiri*). This religious propaganda often finds a seedbed in the hearts of the poor, who fall easy prey to the incentives offered by the terrorists. The leading group propagating this religious ideology and instigating terrorist activities and violence is Boko Haram, officially known as the *Jama'atu Ahlis Suna Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* (the people committed to the prophet's teaching and jihad). The phrase Boko Haram is translated as "Western education is sin," has campaigned for the establishment of an Islamic State in Nigeria and opposes formal education, especially for women and children.¹² In 2014, under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram kidnapped more than 276 girls from Government Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State. This kidnapping is one of many undocumented and unrecorded cases where children have been kidnapped, sold into the slave market or murdered. Terrorism has created an environment of fear and anger for families and children in Northern Nigeria.

Between 2016 and 2023, parents and children have been deprived of the peace and joy of their communities, particularly in the states of Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Benue, Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Katsina, Plateau, Narrasawa, Sokoto, Taraba, and Zamfara. Within the period under review, the upbringing and educational training of the child is made difficult by terrorism. Since 2016, many Nigerians, including children, have been sent to their early graves through the terrorist act of bombing, shooting, burning of houses, and kidnapping. Boko Haram has killed tens of thousands of people in Nigeria. Since the rise of Boko Haram, Osewa observes that "Thousands of citizens of Nigeria have been displaced... social and economic lives of Nigerian citizens had been jeopardized as citizens are not able to go on their daily activities... schools have also been shot down and many teachers killed. These acts have sent many Nigerian children out of school."¹³ In the same affinity, the United Nations Children's Fund report indicates that more than 1,400 schools have been destroyed Borno State of Northern Nigeria and more than 57% of schools remain closed because of damage or being in areas that remain unsafe.¹⁴ Terrorist activities have killed many people and destroyed families and communities. Many children have lost the sense of freedom to play openly in fields due to fear and insecurity. Often, villages are ransacked, burnt, and destroyed at intervals of days or weeks. Terrorism has crippled formal education, the freedom to worship and the peace of the community. Children have been kidnapped, murdered, abused, and deprived of a happy childhood.

The heinous crimes perpetrated by terrorist group's impact on the rights of children. The socio-cultural decline in Northern Nigeria is a pitiable state that demands intervention beyond the rhetoric of divine help by the acolytes of prayers. In the words of

⁶ Rwiza, "Towards a Better Education of Children," 261.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 261

⁸ Raufer, "Foreword," vii.

⁹ See Afoaku, "Islamist Terrorism and State Failure in Northern Nigeria," 20-42.

¹⁰ Ladimeji, "Terrorism in Nigeria," 140.

¹¹(Abolurin, 2012).

¹² See Afoaku, "Islamist Terrorism and State Failure in Northern Nigeria," 20.

¹³Osewa, Ladimeji, S., "Terrorism in Nigeria: Causes, Consequence and Panacea," 679

¹⁴Unicef, "Out-of-school-children-in-north-east-Nigeria." Report in 2017

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Bishop Matthew Kukah: “A catalogue of unprecedented cruelty has been unleashed on innocent citizens across the northern states. In their sleep, on their farmlands, in their markets, or even on the highway, innocent citizens have been mowed down and turned into burnt offerings to gods of evil. Communities have been turned into gulags of misery, death, pain, and perfidy.”¹⁵ The most vulnerable suffrages of terrorism are children, and thus making children become social liabilities rather than a blessing to their families and communities. The situation in the North raises further questions: what is the value of parents having children in Northern Nigeria? What is the role of the Church in protecting the fundamental rights and dignity of children in Nigeria? What are the pastoral modalities and means that can resolve and save children in Northern Nigeria from the activities of terrorism?

Testimonies of Shame and Anger

Childbirth in African families is a divine gift demonstrating the fruitfulness and longevity of the ancestral lineage. Parents in Northern Nigeria desire to see their children prosper and to celebrate their grandchildren and see them attend kindergarten and complete a University Degree. Currently, this desire of parents is unreliable because of terrorism. For example, regarding the desire of parents to see their children attend a formal education, Miriam Mareso observes that “the country has produced one among every five out of children in the world with statistics showing that the government spends only 2.3 per cent of its Growth Domestic Product on both health and education.”¹⁶ Previously, the United Nations Children’s Fund reported that 69% of Nigeria’s out-of-school children are located in the northern part of the country.¹⁷ This Report shows statistics and logistics—“Bauchi State has the highest number of 1.1 million children that are out of school followed by Katsina with 781, 500,” and “out-of-school children in the country at 13.1 million.”¹⁸

The above statistics show how terrorism has become a hindrance to the peaceful education of children. Pernille Ironside observes, “When we speak of out-of-school children, who are they? It is too easy to keep them nameless and faceless.”¹⁹ Yet these Nigerian children live on the streets, in the families and communities. The number of out-of-school children in Northern Nigeria and their exclusion from national development policies and programs is a calamitous case that adversely impacts the future of children.

The peaceful upbringing and education of children by parents remains a dream because of terrorism. The following testimonies capture this sad reality. The first is from Ibrahim Mustafa, whose only daughter, Fatima, was kidnapped on June 18, 2021, while in school.

Fatima 18, was brutally abducted by gun-toting men at her school in Kebbi State, where she has been studying in the last six years. ‘What hurts me and my wife most is that Fatima was abducted on the last day of term, just when school was about to close, and we were already expecting her arrival home,’ said Ibrahim, 45 [years old]. More than two months after her abduction, Fatima remains in captivity. ‘The most painful thing is that we’ve not been able to speak with her since her abduction,’ said Ibrahim. Like the other 200 senior secondary students kidnapped and herded into the bush with Fatima, she had dreams of a future made possible through education, now put on hold. ‘When my wife got the news, she fainted,’ said Ibrahim. ‘She’s been in and out of hospital since then. She does not eat. All she asks me every day is, when is her only child coming home? I wish I had an answer,’ he said, fighting back tears. ‘We want Fatima back. I don’t think we did anything wrong by sending our daughter to school.’²⁰

The narrative and painful account of the parents of Fatima is a shame to recount in Nigeria. The sad reality and frustration experienced by Mustafa is not a mere historical text that unveils a drama of terror. Instead, it captures the pain and anguish as well as the anger and anxiety of many parents in Northern Nigeria. Terrorist groups have destroyed the dream of children to attend formal education and be adequately trained for a better future.

The second testimony is the traumatic experience of Zubairu Hassan, a father of six from Zamfara State. His daughter Hauwa was kidnapped at school in March 2021. The experience has created untold pain for Hassan and his family. As Hassan narrates:

‘It was about midnight when we started hearing gunshots in town. We were confused and nobody knew what was going on. But I felt it was bandits...he said. ‘In my house, we could not sleep. At dawn we went to the mosque and heard that students at the school where Hauwa was studying had been kidnapped,’ said Zubairu. Hauwa and the other students abducted during the attack have since returned. However, Hauwa’s school and other schools in the area remain closed due to fears of more attacks—meaning Hauwa’s education has been put on hold. ‘I think parents should send their children back to school when they reopen,’ said Zubairu, who

¹⁵Kukah, “A Nation Still in Search of Truth and Vindication,” 50.

¹⁶UNICEF, “The United Nations International Children’s Education Fund.”

¹⁷“69 Per cent of Nigeria’s Out-of-school children in the North-UNICEF.”

¹⁸“69 Per cent of Nigeria’s Out-of-school Children in the North-UNICEF.”

¹⁹ “69 per cent of Nigeria’s Out-of-school Children in the North-UNICEF.”

²⁰“In Northern Nigeria, attacks on Schools Threaten Children’s Right to Education.”

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thinks the government should provide security measures at the schools, including perimeter fencing.

‘Education is the right of every child and also their future and the future of our country.’²¹

The cries and anguish of Hassan and his family waiting for the return of Hauwa is tragic. There are many children in captivity whose parents are unaware if their children are alive or dead. Since the abduction of the Chibok girls, terrorist attacks on schools and abductions of children have escalated across Northern Nigeria. Often, the Federal Government of Nigeria has not done enough to condemn and stop the kidnapping of children. According to Bishop Kukah:

Nothing expresses the powerlessness of the families like the silence of state at the Federal level... over hundred Chibok girls are still marooned in the ocean of uncertainty, Leah Sharibu is still unaccounted for. Students of Government College, Yauri, and children from Islamiyya School, Katsina, are still in captivity.

This does not include hundreds of other children whose captures were less dramatic. We also have lost count of hundreds of individuals and families who have been kidnapped and live below the radar of publicity.²²

The shameful kidnapping of school children often ends up in the gruesome murder of some children, their teachers, and sometimes their parents. This is besides the ransom paid at the stipulated time and the risk of negotiators being abducted and murdered by the terrorists.

The testimonies of shame and anger could be summarised as follows—“children go missing; children are separated from their families and deprived of contact with them; children are executed, often to be found in mass graves; children are ill-treated physically, psychologically and sexually; children are enslaved or perform forced labour; children are displaced inside their countries and become refugees outside their countries.”²³ The adverse of terrorism on children remain an albatross for the Nigerian government.

Since 1948, it has been the mandate of the United Nations to promote strategies to protect the human person against perpetrators of injustice. The UN is more vocal on issues of war affecting children in Africa: “African governments must take all necessary measures to end the killing and maiming, abductions, sexual violence, and recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and they must cease attacks on schools, hospitals, and humanitarian operations, as well as ensure that perpetrators of violations against children are held accountable.”²⁴ This clarion call to end violence against children has not led to the resolution of the conflicts in Northern Nigeria.

Humility, Dignity, and Education of the Child

Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God, inaugurates the beginning of new humanity (Col 1:15) through his birth as a child. Through His birth, Christ becomes an exemplar for humans to conform to His image (Rom 8:28), and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, human dignity finds its fullest expression. The conception and birth of the Child Jesus, therefore, are significant moments in the history of human salvation. In choosing to experience childhood, Jesus, the Incarnate Logos, demonstrated that the child is a person created in the dignity and likeness of God. Jesus elevated childhood to the same degree as other phases and stages of human development. Leon Roy maintains that it was “fitting therefore that to inaugurate the new covenant the Son of God should make Himself a little Child?”²⁵ It further expresses the mystery of divine humility to embrace human nature. Jesus Christ, in His incarnate nature (human and divine), grew up in Nazareth under the care of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Joseph (Matt. 22:23). The Holy Family remains a model for Christians and is bequeathed to African families in the care and upbringing of children. In the evangelist account of Jesus missing in the temple, Luke records that Mary and Joseph took the extra journey of searching for the children until they found Jesus teaching (Luke 2: 40-52). The point is that Jesus was raised as a Jewish boy of the culture and context. He was nurtured and grew under the tutelage of Mary and Joseph. Given the cultural milieu of his time, the Child Jesus would also have learned the trade of carpentry and observed the Sabbath and Jewish celebrations.

During his public ministry, Christ promoted the dignity and proper care of children. He loved children and taught extensively about welcoming, loving, and protecting children (Matt. 18:6). Jesus described children as the archetypes of humility and simplicity and accentuated these virtues as pre-conditions for the reception of God’s kingdom (Matt. 18: 2-6; 19: 13-14). From the Gospel of Mark, Jesus declares: “whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:36-37). Another instructive declaration is the docility of the child: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:13-16). Here, Jesus presents the child as an example of humility for entry into the Kingdom of God. Daniel Harrington explains that “this text is really about the kingdom of God and what kind of people can expect to be part of it. Only those who recognize and receive it as a gift (as a child

²¹“In Northern Nigeria, attacks on Schools Threaten Children’s Right to Education.”

²² Kukah “A Nation Still in Search of Truth,” 55.

²³ Red Cross “Children in War.”

²⁴ United Nations, “Children Affected by Armed Conflict in Africa.”

²⁵ Leon, “Child,” 71.

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receives gifts) can expect to be part of God's kingdom; the kingdom is for those who make no claims to power or status, for the kingdom transcends all human power and status."²⁶

With an emphasis on the humility of the child, Jesus taught his disciples to protect the dignity of the child. He relates the child's dignity to nurturing, educating, and protecting the child. Human dignity expresses the sacredness, inviolability, and equality of every person. The child, therefore, as a person is created in the image of God, irrespective of any inequality in terms of physical, intellectual, and moral capacities.²⁷ Pope John XXIII, in *Pacem in Terris*, stresses the importance of the church to collaborate with men and women of goodwill to promote the dignity of the human person.²⁸ Given the human person as *Imago Dei*, Pope John XXIII explains that because man and women are created in the image of God, human beings are persons, with the capacity to participate in the dignity of God, which is the highest good.²⁹ Thus, by the fact that a child is created in the image of God, all children are born equal in dignity and share in a common dignity of humanity.³⁰

The fundamental human rights and privileges accorded the child rest in the fact that every child has a dignity and intrinsic value accorded them by the creator. In other words, the starting point for preserving and protecting the dignity of the child, their proper upbringing and education.

On this basis, the integral education of every child is constituted as a right. On this note, in the "Declaration on Christian Education," the Second Vatican Council taught that "All men [woman] of whatever race, condition or age, in virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to education. This education should be suitable to the particular destiny of the individuals, adapted to their ability, sex, and national cultural tradition."³¹ Similarly, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria considers civil and religious education as the bedrock of human civilization, beginning with the child. According to the bishops: "The family in the strict sense consists of father and mother and children. It is the first and most fundamental community. Within this community, the young undergo the training they need for life. Children have a natural right, stemming from their human nature, to have their faculties developed and their emotions formed."³² Bequeathing an integral education to children is footage of preserving their dignity. The church, therefore, maintains those who are responsible for education must ensure that children are never deprived of this sacred right.³³ However, the surge of terrorism in Northern Nigeria has deprived families from providing the proper and adequate education for their children.

As the first school of learning in human values and use of freedom, the family plays an indispensable role in the lives of children.³⁴ With the openness to procreation in marriage life, parents equally accept the responsibility to train and educate their children, in this way preserving the dignity and integrity of the child. Pope Francis stresses this significant role of family in the life of the child thus: "the family is the first and fundamental school of social living: as a community of love, it finds in self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow."³⁵ A significant question that arises includes:

The Church and Dignity of the Nigerian Child

The communitarian nature of society demands collaboration and partnership between the church and family as well as the church and state in promoting the child's dignity. The Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes* expresses that everyone should consider one another as neighbors and as another self, fostering the means for living a dignified life.³⁶ Suffices to offer a review of both the interventions of the Nigerian government and the church in addressing the ugly situation of terrorism and its impact on children in Nigeria.

The current state of insecurity in Northern Nigeria is the primary responsibility of the Nigerian state. The fundamental duty of the government is the protection of the lives and property of citizens. Given the insurgency and terrorist activities in Northern Nigeria, the Federal Government of Nigeria has failed to protect its citizens, especially children.³⁷ Vivian argues that there is a huge gap between the Nigerian government and its people because "people do not seem to be heard by government officials. While some manage to deal with this in a civilized manner, others take to arms and use fear as their instrument of getting what they want from the country."³⁸ The fact is that the Federal Government of Nigeria has failed to protect the Nigerian child. The Federal Government of Nigeria has made considerable effort to protect the dignity and safety of children in Northern Nigeria through legislation of the Rights of the Child and funding of the Nigerian

²⁶ Harrington, "The Gospel According to Mark," 617.

²⁷ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 78.

²⁸ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 55.

²⁹ Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, nos. 3, 38.

³⁰ Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, nos. 44, 89.

³¹ Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 1.

³² Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, "Christian Marriage and Education," no. 152.

³³ Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 1.

³⁴ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 272.

³⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 37.

³⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 27.

³⁷ Osewa, "Terrorism in Nigeria," 678.

³⁸ Vivian, "The Effect of Terrorism in Nigeria."

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military in the war against insurgency and terrorism. Regarding the former, the Federal Government of Nigeria adopted the 1989 Child's Rights Act in 2003, indirectly endorsing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.³⁹ The 1989 Convention features norms founded on the child's dignity as a person and meant to foster the well-being and integral development of children. Unfortunately, 11 states in Northern Nigeria (Bauchi, Yobe, Kano, Sokoto, Adamawa, Borno, Zamfara, Gombe, Katsina, Kebbi, and Jigawa) have yet to domesticate the Child Rights Act, and with no records of legislative debates on the rights of children. Furthermore, Corruption in the security apparatus of the Nigerian military has affected the provision of security and restoration of peace in Northern Nigeria. Despite the financial vote on the Nigerian military, the efforts of the federal government are drowned by the corruption of government officials and the greed of politicians. In particular, there are indications that there is dissatisfaction among the Nigerian military serving in the theatre of war against terrorists in Northern Nigeria, especially the payment of allowances, the provision of food, and other relevant supplies.⁴⁰ These adversely impact the disposition and lower the morale of the military in their commitment to the fight against terrorism. Consequently, while there are little gains in eradicating terrorism, a lot needs to be done to restore peace in the region.

The church in Nigeria considers protecting the dignity of the child as an integral dimension of its mission. Two major approaches can be seen in how the clergy and laity have contributed to supporting families in the face of terrorism in Northern Nigeria. The first is through the issuance of pastoral statements by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria and diocesan bishops of dioceses affected by terrorism. On their part, the laity through leaders of the Basic Christian Community has equally spoken out for the rights of the child and justice for victims of terrorism. The second is the provision of material aid to victims of terrorism. Primarily, the Catholic bishops through Caritas Nigeria and Justice Peace and Development Commission have been consistent in providing material aid directly to the most vulnerable displaced from their homestead in Northern Nigeria. For example, the response of Caritas Nigeria to humanitarian crises strives to alleviate suffering, protect the vulnerable, and strengthen the community through collaboration with affected communities and non-governmental agencies. This intervention in Northern Nigeria has provided support to more than 4,587,360 persons and 764,560 Households in crisis-affected communities. The areas of intervention include the provision of food, water, sanitation, shelter, health care cohesion, and peacebuilding in a dignified manner.⁴¹

Further, in this essay, recommendations made and are required to sustain drive towards the security of every child in Northern Nigeria and to maintain that their God-given *Rights and Privileges* are respected. "Human rights have also been considered as such "rights, which attach to one by the mere fact of being born as a human being,"⁴² as it does not matter where the child lives. They must be protected by parents, churches, mosques and governments.

We recommend that proper Educational Mentoring by Academic Staff in schools to protect, safe-guard and defend the child in all frontiers of life is a must do. Someone once remarked: "As a staff, we form a community together and we need that oneness to be effective. We don't have to like each other, we don't have to be effective. We don't have to be emotional family for each other, and we don't have to pretend that there aren't huge difference and tensions among us. What is important is that we have a job to do together, a shared mission. Together we must give these kids the best education that's possible."⁴³ This extra-ordinary task, mission and target must be the desire, the will-drive and aspiration of all adults in schools in order to develop the child to full potentials.

From our research and discussion above, we are able to ascertain that most children, living in Northern Nigeria are traumatized and deprived of a proper and happy childhood upbringing. These experiences have had psychological and physical effects on parents and children. The very practical act of rehabilitation of these most vulnerable children requires a lot of money and technical and medical skills. Therefore, these children most affected by the acts of terrorism in Northern Nigeria definitely require direct intervention from the Federal Government of Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Peace has a price, and the child is a precious treasure. Violent crisis breeds a culture of pain and death and destroys peace and love in the community. This is the experience of many families and children in Northern Nigeria. While it is the primary responsibility of the parents and state to protect the dignity of the child, the Catholic Church has a sacred duty to support parents in carrying out this responsibility. The promotion of peaceful co-existence is a craft that must be followed by a concrete strategy for the security of life and properties. This chapter argues that the Church in Nigeria can contribute toward enshrining in the lives of every human person peace to promote ethical values and moral actions that protect the child created in the image and likeness of God. The absence of peace is the cry of children in Northern Nigeria. The testimonies of parents and children in Northern Nigeria is that of shame and anger revealing children who have been abused and killed by acts of terrorism:

³⁹ See United Nations, "Convention on the Rights of the Child."

⁴⁰ See Oriola, "Nigerian Troops in the War," 275-309.

⁴¹ Caritas Internationalis, www.https://caritasinternationalisabuja.org

⁴² Akpala, S. A., "Human Rights Education, Customary Laws the Position of Women in the Contemporary Nigerian Society," in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, 8 (1), 1996, p. 4

⁴³ Rolheiser, Ronald, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, New York: Image, 2014, 118

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ALL THIS IS OUR RIGHT

As leaders, you have this duty to fulfil.
We call on the world's leaders to ensure
we are able to go to school, play
and feel protected... in every circumstance.
We ask leaders to change weapons for books,
bullets for pencils, confrontations for games,
cries for smiles, and hatred for love.
We ask leaders to put a smile on every child's face.
We ask leaders to turn to peace,
to pledge to protect us and promise us development.
We ask leaders to offer us the opportunities
that will enable us to become the best versions of ourselves.
Our common future is at risk. We demand that you act now.⁴⁴

The aforementioned cry of the African child expresses the desires of children in Northern Nigeria. They cry for a peaceful environment to live and grow, to be respected and protected, to be accorded dignity and value, accesses to formal education and moral formation, and the joy and love of being accepted and treasured as a child.

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