

## **ON THE ONSLAUGHT OF THE FULANI HERDSMEN IN NIGERIA: A DISCOURSE ON THE IMPERATIVES OF VIGILANCE**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper interrogates the recurring onslaught of Fulani Herdsmen in many parts Nigeria. The main objective is to underline the need for peace, and given the times, the imperatives of eternal vigilance. The paper is anchored in the theory of just war as frame of analysis. For the generation of necessary data, the paper took advantage of various documentary sources to focus on and explore why and how the onslaught should be seen and addressed. The paper has obvious implications for the individual in society, public policy and the Nigerian situation.*

**Keywords:** Benue, Fulani herdsmen, Self-defence, Theory of just war

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is a country destined for greatness and excellence. She is rightly designated the giant of Africa because *inter alia*, Nigeria has been playing a fatherly role in African politics for decades, providing economic support and peacekeeping assistance when and where necessary. She was to be the beacon of hope for the African continent. Because of her enormous endowments, she was to chart the roadmap for the salvation of the African Continent aptly described by Pope Saint John Paul II as "a continent where human beings – men and women, children and young people – are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandoned. They are in dire need of Good Samaritans who will come to their aid."<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, this hallowed nation is rife with woes, crises, disharmony, distress, conflict, anarchy and doom. It is now a country in utter disarray noted for poverty, hunger, unemployment, corruption, insecurity, terrorism, lack of discipline and mediocrity. In a matter-of-fact fashion, Most Rev. Paulinus Ezeokafor (Bishop of Awka) in his *2018 Lenten Pastoral Letter* describes the gruesome situation in Nigeria where "many people suffer from psychological, spiritual, physical, and emotional problems because of our inability, as a

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<sup>1</sup>John Paul II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 14 September 1995, no. 41.

people, to value human life appropriately and to offer succor where it is needed.”<sup>2</sup> Nigeria seems to have reached her lowest ebb. Virtually, no sector seems to be faring well in Nigeria. Untold suffering and travail has become the lot of Nigerians. Shylock had as well spoken for Nigerians in the *Merchant of Venice* in this untoward line: “For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe”<sup>3</sup> and amazingly we still bear them with a patient shrug.

The input of Emeka G. Ekwuru corroborates this: “Daily, the proliferation of social crimes and the unbearable conditions of human life cloud the future with a notable gloom and bleak.”<sup>4</sup> The recent and growing wave of attacks by the Fulani herdsmen which leave scores of people dead which is the crux of the matter here has made Nigeria akin to the Hobbesian state of nature where life is described as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”<sup>5</sup> The picture we get of this state of nature is of people moving against each other or the anarchic condition Hobbes called “the war of all against all.”<sup>6</sup> Among others, the 2015 carnage in Kwata in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, the 2016 massacre in Nimbo in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State, the 2016 bloodletting in Dori and Mesuma villages in Gashaka Local Government Area of Taraba State, the 2018 mayhems and killings in Dekina and Omala Local Government Areas of Kogi State, the 2018 bloodbath in Guma and Logo Local Government Areas of Benue State stand out graphically to show the cesspool of insecurity we have gone into. Indeed, today more than ever, the sarcasm or prophecy of Pliny the Elder that *ex Africa semper aliquid novi* (out of Africa always emerges things new) has become a reality in Nigeria. The Nigerian situation is truly captured by W. B. Yeats in his poem *The Second Coming*: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold, mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, the blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned; the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.” A brutish situation characterized by maiming and brazen butchering of innocent citizens calls for serious attention. So, what do we do in addition to the *Prayer for Nigeria in Distress* birthed in September 1993?

### **To Your Tent O Israel?**

Without equivocation or fear of contradiction, we must assert that by making man in his image and according to his likeness, man is made a representative, nay, a statue of God by action who will rule over all things previously created. Richard J. Clifford adds that the creation of the human being is climactic by its placement in the account and by the large verses assigned to it. As such, man becomes the pinnacle of the created world.

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<sup>2</sup>Paulinus Ezeokafor, 2018 Lenten Pastoral Letter, *Bearing One Another's Burdens (Gal 6:2): Towards a Befitting Living – Care for the Poor, the Sick, and the Aged*, (Okpuno: Fides Communications, 2018),no. 12.

<sup>3</sup>*Merchant of Venice*, Act 1, Scene 3.

<sup>4</sup>Emeka Ekwuru, *The Pangs of an African Culture in Travail* (Owerri: Totan Publishers Ltd, 1999), 7- 8.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* quoted in S. E. Stumpf and J. Fieser, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 6th edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2002), 219.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* quoted in S. E. Stumpf and J. Fieser, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 217.

It is about the divine attributes that is common to mankind that the psalmist and Jesus Christ respectively reiterate: "You have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour." (Psalm 8:5) "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'?" (John 10:34) Amazed by this grandiose and colossal being, Shakespeare exclaimed: "What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!"<sup>7</sup> This strikes a chord with what we find in his book, *Justice in Communalism*, where the author, John C. Ekei, describes man as the highest good, the beauty of creation.<sup>8</sup> Talking about man's moral worth, the author maintains that everybody's life is an issue for others. "Murder is primarily considered a crime against humanity as such."<sup>9</sup>

Infelicitously, the sanctity of human life has been bastardized and debased in our nation by the onslaught of these savages called Fulani herdsmen. Ours is a time rife with disharmony, oppression, chaos, anarchy and woe. Hence, with the unchecked menace of the Fulani herdsmen, there is cause to fear that the barbaric atmosphere of the rule of the jungle has been installed with its associate *modus vivendi* of *homo homini lupus* (man being a wolf unto his fellow man.)<sup>10</sup> In fact, this is the opportune time to reminisce on Eedris Abdulkareem's song "*Jaga Jaga*."<sup>11</sup>

In the wake of the incessant massacres orchestrated by the Fulani herdsmen who have killed over 3000 innocent citizens since 2015, we are surprised that the IG of Police, Ibrahim Idris through the police spokesman Jimoh Moshood on February 22, 2018 ordered vigilante groups and neighbourhood watch among others to hand in their firearms with the licences in 21 days. Noncompliance, he threatened, will lead to raids and clampdowns together with criminal prosecution for illegal possession of firearms. It is rather shocking and highly suspicious that no attempt has been made at disarming Fulani herdsmen armed with AK 47 assault rifles and sub machine guns. It is law abiding, legally licensed owners of firearms that are the target of this order. If history is anything to go by, then we must vehemently question this order otherwise history will repeat itself. Nobody would like a repeat of Turkey 1911, Russia 1929, China 1935, Germany 1938, Cambodia 1956, and Guatemala 1964.<sup>12</sup> Lest we forget, given similar situations, similar outcomes often occur. Sir Winston

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<sup>7</sup> *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Act 2, Scene 2.

<sup>8</sup> John C. Ekei, *Justice in Communalism: A Foundation of Ethics in African Philosophy*, (Lagos: Realm Communications Ltd., 2001), 94.

<sup>9</sup> John C. Ekei, *Justice in Communalism*, 96.

<sup>10</sup> Emeka Ekwuru, *The Pangs of an African Culture in Travail*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> This song drew opprobrium from the high quarters most especially from the presidency. The song put Eedris at logger heads with Olusegun Obasanjo, the then president. The song was then banned off radio waves.

<sup>12</sup> Turkey disarmed its citizens in 1911 and murdered 10 million Armenians between 1915-1917; Russia disarmed its citizens in 1929 and murdered 20 million Russians between 1929-1953; China disarmed its citizens in 1935 and murdered 20 million Chinese between 1948-1952; Germany disarmed its citizens in 1938 and murdered 6 million Jews between 1939-1945; Cambodia disarmed its citizens in 1956 and murdered 1 million Cambodians between 1975-1977; Guatemala disarmed its citizens in 1964 and murdered 100,000 Mayan Indians between 1964-1981.

Churchill reminds us that “those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” We find a buttress in George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who avows that “we learn from history that we do not learn from history. What experience and history teach us is that people and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.”

The Nigerian situation has gone beyond the level of human endurance. So what do we do in a country where herds of cattle have overtaken man in dignity? Do we fold our hands and pray? What will Jesus Christ have us do?<sup>13</sup> Is it the time to appropriate the words of Julius Caesar as he crossed the river Rubicon *Alea iacta est!* (the die is cast) or chant the infamous poetic lines that birthed the secession of the northern tribes of Israel: “What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, O David?”<sup>14</sup>

Is the time nigh or ripe for everybody to go away to his tents? This write-up says an emphatic no! We are positive that the dry bones can still live. Just like the condition of the Israelites as we find in Ezekiel 37, our bones are dried up, and our hope seems to be lost, we are cut off completely. But we are optimistic that God will open our graves and make us whole again! While we pray and hope, we **must** find a way of defending ourselves since the Nigerian security agencies have virtually failed us. This write-up is full in support of the position of the Catholic Bishops of Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province. This is their stand:

We affirm categorically that quarrels, sectionalism, violence and hate which lead to division and secession are not the right answers to our present predicament. ... We therefore believe that it will be more beneficial to all of us to unite our efforts and invest more energy in building a peaceful Nigeria.<sup>15</sup>

While this write-up favours restructuring as a panacea, it behoves us in the meantime to preserve our lives. It is the living that talk about restructuring. It is only restructuring that can save us from enslavement and hegemony of the Hausa-Fulani cabal. Restructuring is the last hope out of the political, religious, economic, cultural and in particular the security yoke<sup>16</sup> that has enhanced the menace and onslaught of the Fulani herdsmen.

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<sup>13</sup> Jesus demonstrated in Luke 8:26-39 that a human being is worth more than a large herd of swine. We can replace pigs with cattle. The life of a Nigerian is worth more than the whole cattle in Nigeria.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Kings 12:16.

<sup>15</sup> *We Need Peace and Harmony Based on Justice* (A Statement by the Catholic Bishops of Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province), February 14, 2017, no. 4.

<sup>16</sup> All major security agencies in Nigeria like the Army, National Security Advisor, Minister of Defence, Minister of Internal Affairs, Air Force, Police, Economic Financial Crimes Commission, National Civil Defence Corps, Department of State Security, Immigration, Prisons Service, Federal Road Safety Corps, Nigerian Customs Service, Chief of Defence Intelligence, Director of Military Intelligence, Fire Service, National Emergency Management Agency, Nigerian Ports Authority are headed by our northern Moslem brothers.

It is rather worrisome that though Nigeria is nowhere around the top 20 nations<sup>17</sup> in the global cattle business, the onslaught keeps escalating as against what you find in the top cattle nations. The Big question now is: why would Nigeria that doesn't earn a single dollar from cattle export continue to condone either by action or inaction the killing of its citizens on behalf of free cattle grazing and the colony system rather than applying modern technology and ranching to maximize profit from the cattle businesses?

From their *modus operandi*, some are beginning to think that these Fulani herdsmen are pawns in an agenda to overrun all towns in Nigeria. The grazing bill may be very far from an attempt to solve the problem but a camouflage or ploy to enhance the agenda of making Nigeria an estate for Usman Dan Fodio. In *The Parrot Newspaper* of October 12, 1960, Sir Ahmadu Bello had said:

The new nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great grandfather Usman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We use the minorities in the north as willing tools and the south as a conquered territory and never allow them to have control over their own future.

We cannot continue to beg them to stop killing us in our ancestral homes. The decoy or the Trojan horse designated as cattle colonies must be vehemently opposed else we get ready for a repeat of what was the case in Gobir in 1808<sup>18</sup> or Ilorin in 1824<sup>19</sup>. The story would have been the same in Osogbo, Oyo Alaafin, Ibadan, Ado, Igede Ekiti, Bini kingdom if they had not risen up to fight and repel the jihadists masked as herdsmen. We must then prepare for self-defence now because it would appear the Fulanis have apparently prepared themselves for what they call "holy war." Now is the time to checkmate such unwholesome activities of the group by whatever name they are called. The State House of Assemblies in our region should utilize their constitutional rights and pass the anti-grazing bill or anti-cattle colony bill into law for the protection of our region.

### **Justification for Self-Defence: The Just War Theory**

In all fairness, war has horrendous and terrific consequences like maiming and killing. It breeds hatred, discord, dissention, suspicion, rivalry, strife and contention. Being fully

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<sup>17</sup> In a cattle inventory carried out between 2016 and 2017, the fact sheet shows India possessing 303 million, Brazil - 226 million, China - 100 million, USA - 93 million, EU - 89 million, Argentina - 53 million, Australia - 27 million, Russia - 18 million, Mexico - 16 million, Turkey - 14 million. Top 10 milk exporters are New Zealand, Germany, Netherlands, France, USA, Belgium, Australia, Belarus, UK, and Saudi Arabia. Top 10 beef exporters are Australia, USA, Brazil, India, Netherlands, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, Uruguay, and Germany.

<sup>18</sup> King Yunfa, the Hausa Sarki in Gobir now called Sokoto showed hospitality to the Fulani immigrant named Usman Dan Fodio only for the immigrant to kill Yunfa in 1808. King Yunfa having being eliminated, Usman Dan Fodio took over by establishing the Sokoto caliphate and became its Sultan.

<sup>19</sup> Janta Alimi was allowed to settle in Ilorin by the Afonja dynasty. This warm gesture cost Afonja his life in 1824. Till today, Ilorin remains an emirate under Sokoto caliphate.

cognizant of the ravages of war, Shakespeare in King *Henry IV, Part 2* writes:

O war! thou son of hell, whom angry heavens do make their minister,  
Throw in the frozen bosoms of our part. Hot coals of vengeance!  
Let no soldier fly. He that is truly dedicate to war  
Hath no self-love, nor he that loves himself,  
Hath not essentially but by circumstance The name of valour

- Act V, scene 2, line 33

With the unutterable woes that go with wars, we may ask: Are there no alternatives to war? Should wars be fought at all? Nonetheless, faced with unjust aggression, wouldn't pacifism<sup>20</sup> which is the belief that war and violence are always wrong "not boil down to a crime of inaction or failure to do something in the face of evil? If the only way to prevent people from being raped or tortured unjustly is through violence and war, should we not choose the option of war?"<sup>21</sup> This evokes the ethical principle of double effect. Self-defense here becomes a necessary evil. The just war theory allows for self-defense and permits war as the last resort. Proponents here include St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Suarez, Hugo Grotius, Vattel, and Walzer. In his book entitled *Theories of War and the Option for Peace*, Augustine Oburota summarized the principles of the just war tradition under seven topics. (a) The last resort argument which counsels against rushing to war without first exhausting all plausible, peaceful alternatives to ending the dispute in question. (b) Wars are to be declared by the legitimate authority following due process. (c) There must be a just cause like self-defence, nay unjustified violence or violation of rights for initiating a war or defending oneself. Other principles include: (d) Reasonable chance of success. (e) Ultimate goal as re-establishment of peace. (f) Proportionate violence. (g) Protection of civilians.

The merit of the just war theory lies in its preference for the option for peace. It is peace oriented. This resonates with what Aristotle wrote in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that "we make war that we may live in peace." In support of this theory, Augustine in the *City of God* said that "peace is not sought in order to provoke war, but war is waged in order to attain peace." In the face of our unjust aggressors, the just war theory demands that we rise and defend ourselves. *Salus populi suprema lex* (the salvation of the people is the supreme law). It is our salvation as a people that is now at stake. Remember Homer's famous putdown: "the gods cannot do for man what man must do for himself." The counsel we find in 1 Peter 5:8 becomes highly pertinent here: "Be calm but vigilant, because your enemy the devil is prowling round like a roaring lion, looking for someone to eat." Hence, let us rise and defend ourselves for tomorrow may be too late for "there is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of

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<sup>20</sup> Pacifism totally rejects war and violence as means of settling disputes, in favour of peace always and in all circumstances.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine C. Oburota, *Theories of War and the Option for Peace* (Awka: Demecury Bright Printing and Publishing CDo., 2009), 24.

their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat; and we must take the current when it serves or lose our ventures.”<sup>22</sup>

The massacre in Benue and Kogi may seem far away from us but we remember the famous words of John Donne: “Each man's death diminishes me, for I am involved in mankind. Therefore, send not to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.” We wind up with a poem written by a Lutheran pastor Martin Niemoller entitled *First They Came* which addresses the cowardice of the intellectuals in the face of the holocaust orchestrated by Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Germany:

First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out,  
because I was not a Communist,  
Then they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out,  
because I was not a Socialist  
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out  
because I was not a trade unionist  
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out,  
because I was not a Jew  
Then they came for me, and there was no one left, to speak out for me

### **Acknowledgements**

This is to acknowledge and appreciate the paternal assistances and concern of our local ordinaries, seminary formators and lecturers under the aegis of Rev. Fr. Dr. Albert Ikpenwa, for their invaluable and selfless sacrifices. With love and admiration, I attest that you are the giants on whose shoulders we stand upon.

### **Note**

This is a slightly reworked version of a Valedictory speech titled “Be Calm But Vigilant (1 Peter 5:8): An Imperative To Protect Ourselves From The Onslaught Of The Fulani Herdsmen” presented by author on the occasion of the 47<sup>th</sup> Convocation Ceremony of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, NIGERIA, on March 19, 2018 on behalf of the 2016/2017 Theology and Philosophy Graduands.

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<sup>22</sup>*Julius Caesar*, Act 4, Scene 3.