‘Ministry of Religious Affairs” is NOT the Answer: Reply to Owerri Muslim Leader’s Call

Francis Anekwe Oborji

The Chairman of the Hausa Welfare Community in Imo State, Malam Alhaji Magaji Ibrahim, was reported recently by the Vanguard Newspaper, to have called on the Federal Government of Nigeria to establish a “Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs” in order to address the issue of religious crises in the country. Malam Magaji made the call on Thursday, January 26, 2017, “in Owerri, the capital of Imo State while fielding questions from some journalists on the recent Southern Kaduna genocide being perpetuated by the terrorist group, the Fulani herdsman militia.” For Malam Magaji, if the government should address the issues arising from the Southern Kaduna incident, “it must look at them holistically.” According to Malam Magaji:

“The government should look beyond the surface of the crisis. To achieve this, I want the government to establish ministry of religious and cultural affairs to start with.” (Magaji Ibrahim in Owerri, January 26, 2017).

In responding to these statements accredited to Malam Magaji, we would like to start with the assertion that what Nigeria needs in order to respond proactively and ‘holistically’ to the on-going case of mass-killings of innocent citizens perpetuated by known terrorist groups, Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen, is simply, a ‘strong judiciary and justice ministry’, NOT “ministry of religious affairs.” Again, it is our belief that Nigeria as a secular state, cannot venture into such a thing like establishment of a “ministry of religious affairs” without jeopardizing its very existence as a heterogeneous and plural-religious nation-state.

To begin with, there is nothing wrong, however, in asking the state or rather the government to “look holistically” into the root causes of the incessant mass-killings of innocent Nigerians, perpetuated by already known terrorist groups, Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen militia. That is what everyone expects from a responsible government in order to bring the culprits to book and protect the lives and property of its citizens from criminal acts of these misguided elements, who still roam freely all over the country. In other words, Malam Magaji may be right if what he is suggesting is that the Nigerian state or rather the government of the day in that regard, has failed in its basic duty and responsibility of providing security and justice to the people.

But is this actually what Malam Magaji had in mind when he made that statement at Owerri? Was Malam Magaji in uttering those words, had in mind about the government’s total failure in delivering justice and protecting the lives and property of innocent citizens from the evil designs and continued attacks of these terrorist groups, Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen militia? Was Malam Magaji in that interview he granted to journalists at Owerri, concerned about the fact that majority of Nigerians, especially, the victims of the activities of these terror groups have already lost confidence in the capacity of the government of the day? People have
lost confidence in the ability of the government of the day to deliver justice and protect the people and indeed the country from both internal and external aggressions of this magnitude.

One is afraid, indeed, because, these are not in the least what Malam Magaji had in mind when he uttered those words in Owerri, about the need for the government “to look holistically into the issue of religious crisis in the country.” Mind you, Malam Magaji is not concerned about the lives of innocent Nigerians, wasted by these terror groups. Rather his concern is about the need to halt any obstacle militating against the present government’s body language and actions, which many right thinking individuals see as desperate attempts towards promoting Islamic religion and Hausa-Fulani expansionism in Nigeria. This is the ultimate reason behind Malam Magaji’s call for the government of the day to establish a “ministry of religious affairs” in Nigeria. Malam Magaji wants the government to establish a “ministry of religious affairs” through which it would be easy for the state to legislate on religion, suppress those it dislikes and in the process impose Islamic religion as the nation’s supreme religion and Hausa-Fulani tradition and culture as Nigeria’s new cultural ethos.

The suggestion of Malam Magaji for establishment of “ministry of religious affairs” reminds one of medieval era, when the state or rather the kingdom is personified in the person of the Sovereign. The sovereign (Potentate) owns the kingdom as his personal property, he appoints and removes at will any of his ministers who fails to dance according to the whims and caprices of the sovereign himself. The sovereign in this case, may need a “ministry of religious affairs” in his kingdom. He appoints a minister who would oversee on his behalf, the religious activities and beliefs of the subjects of the kingdom. In the kingdom every citizen (including the minister of religious affairs), is a subject of the sovereign. The sovereign is above the Constitution and the law. He can order for the elimination or killing of any citizen or subject of his kingdom at any time. Not even in communist era is this type of thing contemplated. Communist governments simply suppressed all religions, and that was all. Communist governments never favored a particular religion.

In modern day Islamic world, especially, in those extremist conservative places that still see their nation as a religious kingdom or state, it is taken for granted that the religion of the sovereign must be the religion of every subject in that kingdom. This is the case, for example in Saudi Arabia, where no other religion is to co-exist with Islam. Christians, even foreigners living in Saudi Arabia are not given permission to build houses of worship. In principle, all must worship as Muslims in the kingdom. In this case, the King or rather the Prince would establish a “ministry of religious affairs” to checkmate those who may disobey his rule concerning religious observances in the kingdom. Is this not what Malam Magaji’s call for establishment of a “ministry of religious affairs” in Nigeria, may be leading to?

Sadly, we may remember that this is not the first time this type of call for establishment of “ministry of religious affairs” in Nigeria was suggested, and even vigorously advanced by the government in power. In mid 1980s, the federal military government of General Ibrahim B. Babaginda, wanted to establish such a “ministry of religious affairs” in the country. This was after Babaginda military junta, secretly smuggled and registered Nigeria as a member of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Ebite Ukiwe, an Igbo Christian from Eastern Nigeria,
who was the second in command to Babaginda at the Supreme Military Council, was kept in
dark when this decision, to register Nigeria as a member of OIC was taken by the Babaginda
military junta.

In fact, the deal was done, exactly, when Ebite Ukiwe was on an official visit outside the
country. On his return to Nigeria, journalists confronted him at the International Airport in
Lagos, and asked his opinion about Nigeria’s membership of OIC then in vogue. As typical of
him, Ukiwe told the journalists that, at least, to the best of his knowledge, “the matter of
registering Nigeria as a member of Organization of Islamic Conference was never discussed at
the Supreme Military Council.” Babaginda did not take this response of Ebite Ukiwe kindly.
General Babaginda was infuriated with Ukiwe. In a question of less than twenty-four hours after
the interview with journalist at the Lagos airport, Ukiwe was relieved of his office as second-in-
command and retired from the army (Nigerian Navy) with immediate effect.

It was in the midst of reactions of Nigerians to this ugly incident that Babaginda, in his
usual manner of maneuvering, began the move to establish “ministry of religious affairs.” Some
Nigerians even began to campaign for this idea. Meetings were held with leading religious
leaders, especially, Christians. In fact, at a point, it was suggested that various religious bodies
should submit names of their ranks and files whom they would like to constitute members of the
“new ministry of religious affairs.” If not for the insightful intervention of some Nigerian
intellectuals, especially, Catholic theologians, most of our bishops had even started to buy the
idea of establishing “ministry of religious affairs” in Nigeria. Fortunately, as God would have it,
that idea died a natural death.

Therefore, it is surprising that after over thirty years Nigerians rejected that idea of
“ministry of religious affairs”, some people are still reintroducing it from backdoor into the
Nigerian political debate scenario. What is most worrisome is the fact that such a call is coming
from a respected Muslim leader, in the caliber of Malam Alhaji Magaji Ibrahim, who lives in
Eastern Nigeria. For Malam Magaji to have initiated such a call, and in Eastern Nigeria of all
places, is worrisome. There is no doubt that he is not alone in this matter! In Nigeria’s present
situation, a person of the caliber of Malam Magaji cannot have just made such a call in Eastern
Nigerian state capital, without one sensing something deeper behind it. This is why any relatively
conscious Nigerian should not allow such a call for “ministry of religious affairs” to be
established in Nigeria, to go without a second look. Such a call for establishment of “ministry of
religious affairs” in Nigeria is useless since it holds no grounds in the nation’s Constitution or in
the workings of modern nation states.

The question is, ‘by reintroducing the rejected idea of establishing “ministry of religious
affairs” in Nigeria in this twenty-first century, are we, as a nation-state moving forward or
retrogressing?’ In fact, from hindsight, a good number of Nigerians are saying that the proposed
“ministry of religious affairs”, is nothing but a subtle way, those in power want to use to achieve
a sinister objective. The objective is nothing, but to arrive at the making of Nigeria an “Islamic
State.” If this is so, allora (as Italians would say), we must tread with cautions here.
On its own, however, the call of Malam Magaji for the establishment of a “ministry of religious affairs” in Nigeria as government means of responding to the ongoing “genocide being perpetuated by the Fulani Herdsmen against Christians and other Nigerians of non-Hausa-Fulani origins”, may on the surface appear plausible and reasonable. At least, as the proponents of it may argue, such a “ministry of religious affairs” would create a direct channel for the government intervention and first-hand knowledge of the reality on the ground whenever religious conflict surges its ugly head. Again, it would be a good forum for cordial interaction and relationship between the government and religious leaders. This type of cordial relationship, some may argue, is what we need today to promote co-existence and peaceful living among followers of different religions in the country. Moreover, some proponents of this idea may argue that, it would make the government share or rather shift the blame of religious violence to the inept attitudes of religious leaders who may be serving as members of the new “ministry of religious affairs.” The victims of religious violence would now have their religious leaders to blame and no longer the state whenever religious violence erupts.

Already, religious organizations among themselves have inter-faith dialogue commissions and regular meetings for interreligious dialogue at various levels, which take care of most of these issues raised here. Therefore, interesting as these arguments for establishment of a “ministry of religious affairs” may appear, however, there are other sides of the coin. How do we trust a government or state that is yet to respond proactively to any of the mass-killings perpetuated by the Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen terrorist groups in various parts of Nigeria since the regime came to power in 2015, to establish a “ministry of religious affairs” to function impartially in handling these delicate issues of genocide? A government seen as an accomplice in the recent Southern Kaduna genocide of Christians perpetuated by the Fulani herdsmen militia? A government recently accused by Amnesty International for sponsoring Nigerian security and law enforcement agencies, the Army and Police in the extra-judicial killings of unarmed young pro-Biafra protesters in Eastern Nigeria? A government seen by many as an accomplice in the recent massacre of Shiite Muslims in Kaduna State. How can such a government be an impartial arbitrator in settling a dispute in which, it is being accused as the main sponsor of perpetrators of these acts of violence? How can a “ministry of religious affairs” of such a government be an impartial arbitrator in rendering justice to victims of violence? These are hard questions to contemplate!

Nigeria Needs Strong Judiciary and Justice Ministry, NOT “Ministry of Religious Affairs”

A critical look at the reasons advanced so far for the establishment of a “ministry of religious affairs”, may convince one that Malam Magaji’s call is loaded with some worrisome sinister agenda, of which the fear of those who accuse the present federal government of working for a total Islamization of Nigeria, may not be ruled out completely. The fact is that the incident of mass-killings of Christians in Southern Kaduna by the Fulani herdsmen militia (as in other of such atrocious cases), is a criminal matter and not religious. The handling of such cases (criminal) belongs to the works of custodians and interpreters of nation’s Constitution and therefore, to the ministry of justice and the law courts (judiciary). The victims of violence are
crying for justice, not “ministry of religious affairs.” The same thing applies to the victims of similar mass-killings previously carried out also by the same Fulani herdsmen militia in Agatu in Benin State, Nimbo and Attakwu areas of Enugu State, etc. The fact that up-till now, our ministry of justice and nation’s judiciary divisions are still silent about these mass-killings of innocent Nigerians perpetrated by known terrorist groups should give all of us a cause for concern. What of the government continued silence on the already known brutality perpetuated by the Nigerian Army and Police against unarmed prof-Biafra protesters in Eastern Nigeria and the Shiite Muslims in Kaduna State? Again, the fact that our law-makers, both at the state and federal levels, have not even started to deliberate on these issues or promulgating new laws where our Constitution may be lacking, to address these issues of justice to the victims of terrorist attacks and military brutality, leaves much to be desired.

The first article of 1999 Constitution assigned to the Nigerian State, the duty of protecting lives and promoting welfare of all Nigerians based on the principles of freedom, equality and justice. This is the first and primary duty of the three arms of the government (executive, legislature and judiciary) to the Nigerian citizens. The judiciary is an independent arm of the government. Its’ duty is precisely to checkmate excesses of the Executive arm of the government – its component institutions such as, the Army, Police, or agencies like DSS or EFCC, through judiciary processes and dispensation of justice on the basis of equality which all of us share before the law. It is also the primary duty of the judiciary, with the collaboration of the Police, to investigate criminal, civil or any of such cases that infringe on the basic rights of the individuals in the society as enshrined in the Constitution and other relevant laws. It is for this reason that the Constitution invested judiciary with status of independence and final arbitrator in the execution of justice to the citizens.

In other words, there is already an arm of government and state institutions as well as agencies invested by the Constitution to handle the issues of violence and violation of human rights and dignity of individuals or rather right to life of citizens, whenever violated by criminal elements in the society. The handling of a criminal case such as killings of innocent persons or mass-murder is not the duty of religious organizations. It is also not a matter of establishing a governmental ministerial office, manned by the state and religious bodies.

In this context, it may not be out of place to say here that it is high time we stop making the mistake of blaming religious organizations for every misdemeanor in the society. Some people nowadays are in the habit of blaming religion or the churches as being responsible for the problem of insecurity and unemployment in the country. Some individuals (including some intellectuals, university professors and Vice-Chancellors), have even gone to the extent of saying that religion is also responsible for Nigeria’s backwardness in technological and industrial developments. This type of argument portrays our poverty of thought and critical thinking. We have assigned to religion the duty and responsibility of the state. That is unfair!

The duty of promoting security of life and property as well as welfare of the citizens is that of the state and not religion or the church. In the same way, maintenance of law and order in the society belongs to the state. It is also the responsibility of the state to promote the enabling environment for industrial and technological developments in the country to thrive. The state is
also to ensure that citizens are gainfully, employed, that education and medical-care are available and affordable to all and sundry, not just to the privileged few. Voluntary agencies, such as religious organizations and churches may engage in school education and hospital services, only as complement to that of the state. The state may regulate things in these areas of voluntary organizations participation in providing social services to people so as to make sure that the citizens, whether in a public or private school (or hospital), receive qualitative and best of services, irrespective of one’s creed or ethnic affiliation.

Ministry of justice and the judiciary in collaboration with the law enforcement agencies are the competent authorities to investigate and bring to book and justice, the violators of the sacredness and inviolability of human life. Killing or taking away the life of innocent individual (or individuals) is the highest form of criminal act any sane society can condone. Anybody that kills or takes away the life of another human person has no respect to human life. Such a person or individual by his action has demonstrated that he is a criminal and therefore, the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary are duty-bound to make sure that such an individual is isolated, taken away from circulation and brought to justice. This is the only way to promote peace in the society and restore the hope of the people in the government and judiciary. This function cannot be for a “ministry of religious affairs” no matter how good its intention may be.

The question is, ‘where on earth, or rather in civilized world today, are incidents of genocide or mass-killings of innocent citizens by avowed terrorist groups (such as Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen militia), handled by a ‘ministry of religious affairs’? When has it become the onus in a plural society and modern nation-state (such as Nigeria) to establish a ‘ministry of religious affairs’ in order to address criminal cases like mass murder and killings of innocent citizens in the name of religion?

The question is, when has it become the duty of a political and often ethnic and religious biased “ministry” such as the proposed “ministry of religious affairs” to address the issue of mass-killings of innocent citizens by terrorist groups? This is very worrisome, especially, in the case of the recent incident of Southern Kaduna, which took place under the watchful eye of law enforcement agencies such as the Army and Police and which occurred almost immediately, the State governor visited the place and imposed 24 hours curfew there? It was a kind of a replica of the Nimbo, Enugu state massacre of the natives by Fulani herdsmen early last year.

The Uzo-Uwani local government Chairman, in which Nimbo belongs, informed the Enugu State governor of the immediate threat from the dreaded terrorist group, Fulani herdsmen militia. The governor in turn called Abuja to notify President Buhari who is the Chief security officer of the federation, in virtue of his office, but there was no clear response from Abuja. The Enugu governor turned to the General officer commanding 82 Division of the Nigerian Army in Enugu, and the Enugu State Police Commissioner as well as the Department of DSS in Enugu. He held an emergency security meeting that same evening with all these people charged with providing security to the people, and they assured the governor that they have taken control of the situation. Unfortunately, the Fulani herdsmen militia struck at Nimbo, Enugu State, that same day and night, killing over 200 innocent citizens, wounding many others and destroying people’s house and property worth billions of Naira.
In other words, if these militia groups struck the same night an emergency security meeting took place in Enugu, that means that someone in the corridors of power, who had been following the security meetings at Enugu State government Houses and Abuja, was feeding the Fulani herdsman militia with vital information, telling them the appropriate time to strike. This has been the suspicion of a good number of people since that incident happened. Because nobody has been called to book since then. The same scenario happened in Agatu in Benue State, few months before Nimbo, Enugu State massacre. It later happened in Attakwu, another rural community in Enugu State. Now, there is that of Southern Kaduna and some others. Till date, nobody has been charged and brought to justice in any of these cases of clear mass killings perpetrated by known terrorist group, Fulani herdsman militia.

The separation of the State and Religion is ‘Sacrosanct’

Both Nigerian and international laws make a clear distinction between the state and religion. The state should not meddle with the affairs of religion just as religion should not meddle with the affairs of the state. Religion should be left alone and remain within its ambient of custodian and caretaker of people’s moral values and spiritual welfare. Aside, the undesirable activities of charlatans of modern Nigeria type of neo-Pentecostalism and healing ministry, who specialize in offering of distorted teaching and deformed religiosity, the activities of modern day workers and seekers of miracles, most of whom have given their souls to the Devil, and of which distressed poor people have been their most vulnerable victims. No doubt, this situation should give mainline churches, religious organizations and their leaders a serious cause for concern. The greatest challenge however, is for the mainline or rather authentic churches and religious organizations to develop a people-oriented pastoral ministry, be with the people at their grassroots level; let every member have a face in the church and feel belonged.

Be that as it may, yet, most of the time, the churches have proved themselves the real life-wire in sustaining the people in difficulty times. This was the case during the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970). If not for the charitable activities of the churches, the Biafra genocide could have taken a much higher toll. Again, today, amidst the terrorist activities of killer groups such as Boko Haram and Fulani herdsman militia, churches and religious organizations have continued with their heroic work of assisting Internal Displaced Persons (IDP) in various parts of the country and elsewhere. The churches work under very risk and dangerous conditions to stay with the IDP populations and assist them in the war-torn areas.

Moreover, with the present economic meltdown, and leadership crisis in the country, the churches appear to be the only place people are turning to seek help and solace. People seemed to have lost confidence in the state. Because in the eye of the average individual, the Nigerian state as it were, is not well structured and even organized to handle such basic social needs of the people such as security and respect to human and civil rights of its citizens. People look for and go to places they feel are better organized to help them. The churches appear to be the only well-organized communities for many people of faith in the land these days. Nowadays, the churches
combine their spiritual ministry with social work or rather integral human development program. The churches do all these without asking for government help, because it will come.

In any case, the government should not meddle in religious affairs. This is how it should be. Government as the servant of the state and people should concentrate on its duty to the state and people. Religious organizations, on their own part, should concentrate on their duty of providing spiritual care of the society as well as participate in integral human development of the people through pastoral ministry and moral teaching. It is also the duty of religious leaders to exhort those in authority through teaching and balanced preaching and remind them of their moral obligations as elected individuals in public offices to live up to the demands of their respective offices and pursue a people-oriented program, from bottom-up and not the other way round. The churches or religious organizations cannot perform these functions effectively when they are under government control and influence through the so-called “ministry of religious affairs.”

In fact, one of the unforgivable original sins of Obasanjo government of 1999 was to have allowed the introduction of Sharia Islamic law as a state law in Northern Nigeria. Today, state governments and most people in the North see Sharia law as supreme over and above the nation’s Constitution. Instead of allowing the introduction of Sharia legal system at any government level in Nigeria, we could have insisted on the fact that the separation of the state and religion is sacrosanct. We could have defended our Constitution as the most important document in the land and our legal system as the level playing ground for all citizens and states of the federation. We could have defended the Constitution at all cost and make it clear to our Muslim brethren in the North that Sharia as a religious law belongs to areas of worship, religious ambient and the Mosque and not to state. It should have nothing to do with the state, how a civil authority, the state, is to govern the people or judiciary carry out its legal proceedings.

The co-existence of Sharia law in par with the nation’s Constitution and as a state legal system in Northern Nigerian states is an original sin Nigeria will continue to live to regret. Because, in the final analysis, the renewed resurgence of Islamic terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram in North East Nigeria, began rearing its ugly head immediately after the introduction of the Sharia law as a State law in Northern Nigeria during the Obasanjo regime. In fact, the struggle of the terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and Fulani herdsman militia is anchored on the struggle for a total introduction of Sharia legal system throughout Nigeria. Since it has happened in all the states in Northern Nigeria, these terrorist groups do not see any reason why it cannot be so in other parts of the country. Moreover, the introduction of Sharia legal system all over Nigeria, has often been rumored as age-long dream of founders of modern Northern Nigeria. After all, the present President of Nigeria, General Muhammed Buhari was quoted before his election, some years back, that he would “spend the rest of his political life and energy in making sure that Islam is spread throughout the country.” Therefore, it is difficult to convince a good number of Nigerian Christians and others living in the central and southern part of the country, including the non-Muslims in the North that Malam Magaji’s call for establishment of a “ministry of religious affairs” is not part of the overall agenda to Islamize Nigeria.
Towards a “New Nigeria” founded on African Values and Cultural Ethos

One would have been pleased if Malam Magaji’s call is about re-foundation of Nigeria as a nation state based on African cultural values and vision of life. Instead of calling for establishment of “ministry of religious affairs”, which only aims to promote foreign culture and alien religious legal system in the country, why can’t we promote a ‘new Nigeria’, founded on African values and cultural ethos? At least the 1999 Constitution in its opening preamble seems close to advocate a new Nigeria of such a kind.

John Garang, the late leader of South Sudan, at the height of his struggle for the liberation of his people, spoke of a “New Sudan.” According to him, the Sudan he saw himself then as an African, was unfortunately, not founded on African cultural values and vision of life. Rather, it was founded on Arab principles and cultural ethos. He argues that since all Sudanese claimed to be Africans not only by birth but especially, by geography and history, then, they should allow their country, Sudan to be founded on African cultural values and vision of life, without, however, infringing on the religious rights and freedom of the individual. They should all look towards Africa and see it as their home, both socio-culturally and socio-religiously. The New Sudan was expected to be founded on African cultural matrix and history. That was the “Sudan” Garang had imagined and wanted to found in his country when he started the struggle for the liberation of his people in South Sudan. Garang was assassinated through an unexplainable Air Plane crash before he could realize this dream. This was before his people in South Sudan gained their political independence from Northern Sudan Arab-Muslim dominated government. As in many cases of other liberation struggles, Garang paid the price with his own life.

Garang’s same vision and determination as an African leader of his persecuted people in an Arab-Muslim dominated Sudan, could as well be seen (though in different contexts), in the lives and struggles of Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Patrice Lumumba of Democratic Republic of Congo, Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, among others. At the ecclesiastical level, however, the personal examples of Cardinal Joseph Malula of Democratic Republic of Congo, and Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, among others, may suffice here.

In other words, we should not forget that we are first of all Africans, before we are Christians or Muslims. In fact, our religious background whether a Christian or Muslim, remains African Traditional Religion (ATR), the primal religion of our forebears. It was the fertile ground, under which our forebears and a good number of African Christians and Muslims we see today, embraced their new religions. African traditional religion, the religion of our forebears, was a peaceful and tolerant religion. No wonder in Christian theology of religions, we speak of ATR as a providential way God used in preparing the forbears of Africa for the reception of the Christian faith through proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

In other words, re-founding our nation’s ethos and vision of life on African cultural values and traditions, sounds healthier than the call for establishment of a “ministry of religious affairs.” A “ministry of religious affairs” can only promote an alien culture and legal ethos of terror groups such as Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen in our land. While African cultural values and vision of life, on the other hand, will help our country and citizens to learn to live together and practice our religious diversity in justice, freedom, honesty, peace and love of one another, in the light of modern culture of a secular state of tolerance and co-existence among neighbors. These are the basic values we need today in Nigeria. Let us stop imposing our
religion and way of life on others through government machinery. Let us respect the natural and Constitutional distinctions between religion and state, and stop mixing up the two in our land and nation.

Conclusion

The route to peace and co-existence among diverse peoples and individuals in any plural society and community is justice. Without justice, there will be no peace and unity among the people. What we need to strengthen is our ministry of justice and judiciary. We need to respect the independence of judiciary as enshrined in the Constitution. The inept leadership of this arm of government in dispensing justice in this regard of reckless killings and mass murder of innocent Nigerians being perpetuated by known terrorist groups, Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen militia, should worry all of us.

Again, we should be disturbed that in this 21st century, the debate in Nigeria’s political landscape is still dominated by archaic topics, such as establishing a ‘ministry of religious affairs’ or ‘Cattle grazing villages’ all over the country to cater for the same Fulani herdsmen and their Cattles. We are in the twenty-first century. The present generations of Nigerians and young people in general, have come a long way. Most of young Nigerians of today have mingled with the civilized world. They live in the space different from those of older generations, who still harbor the medieval and 1960s mindsets. Today’s young people think and plan more strategically than the generations of their fathers and mothers. They have seen how modern societies are organized. They look forward to transforming their fatherland into a modern free state, founded on rule of law and order as well as promoting security of lives and property of the citizens.

The young Nigerians of today know that they will one day put into maximum use whatever they have learnt in their contact with the modern democratic and free society in civilized world. They have gotten access to all the modern world information technology outfits, thanks to internet and social media. Our young generations can manufacture and handle sophisticated industrial and technological machines no matter where it is located in the orbit or planet earth, be it in a surface air space or the cyber. Our young people today have learnt how to go to the moon, conduct a research, even under the waters of oceans and seas. Again, the young Nigerians of today have more balanced sense of history and justice than the older generations who are still living under the debris of 1960s mindset. Above all, the young Nigerians of today are religiously conscious just like their counterparts in other African countries. They would not tolerate any tyrant act on the part of their political leaders that aims to rob them their religious freedom of worship. The youth of today are intellectually, spiritually and psychologically better prepared than the generations of the old to respond to antics of dictatorial and tyrannical regime that may infringe on people’s basic human rights and freedom.

Therefore, anybody, who still takes for granted or underestimates the present generation of young Nigerian men and women, should have a rethink. We may be playing with fire, when these young people, now scattered all over the world, continue to watch hopelessly from wherever they may be, their people and loved ones in their villages being butchered by the Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram militia and we do nothing to stop the carnage and bring the
culprits to justice. It is government inability to bring the culprits to book and justice to the victims of violence that pose the greatest danger to Nigerian state today. It is also government inability to create an enabling environment for talented young people to thrive, work and live in peace and respect of one another in any part of the country that will put the death nail on Nigeria, and not the agitations of these young people against the irresponsible leadership of the government in power.

Francis Anekwe Oborji is a Roman Catholic Priest. He lives in Rome, where he is professor of missiology (mission theology) in a Pontifical University.