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Executive Summary

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Responding to the Challenge of Boko Haram

John Azumah

The Nigerian militant group Boko Haram (literally meaning, 'Western education is forbidden') has been grabbing the headlines with brutal attacks on the Nigerian security forces, villages, churches, mosques, markets, and English-medium schools, as well as targeted murders of prominent Muslim clerics in northeastern Nigeria.

Understanding who they are, what is their origin, and what they really stand for has been made difficult by various factors, including the climate of fear and hysteria that the attacks have created within Nigeria and the nature of Nigerian politics that breeds, and feeds on, rumours and conspiracy theories.

Boko Haram's ideology has four main features: opposition to aspects of Western education; opposition to the modern secular state of Nigeria; the desire to establish an Islamic caliphate in line with the old Islamic empire of Borno which covered part of present-day northeastern Nigeria; and the use of violence (militant jihad) to achieve their goals.

The comprehensive implementation of shari'a in northern Nigerian states was an abysmal failure due to selective justice, corruption, and abuse of the system, which led to loss of public confidence and disillusionment among the leadership of the activist groups. Disillusionment with this failure contributed to the rise of extremist groups like Boko Haram.

The 1980s started with violent intra-Muslim conflicts, while the late 1980s marked the beginning of Christian-Muslim riots and violence, mostly started on campuses by student groups. These conflicts persisted and increased in intensity through the 1990s and 2000s—Nigeria's 'Decades of Blood', with horrific acts of violence committed by all sides.

Boko Haram is able to exploit several current problems for the purposes of both recruitment and operations, including weak local, state, and federal institutions; widening gap between rich and poor; a climate of rumours and conspiracy theories; the tendency of state and federal officials to deny or downplay the scale of atrocities; incompetent and unprofessional security forces; rampant corruption and collusion on the part of the police; loss of faith in the justice system; and a culture of vigilantism and impunity.

Christians should resist the temptation of stereotyping and problematising Islam with arguments that groups like Boko Haram represent the true face of Islam. However, more importantly, the narrative that Islam or the Qur'an or Muhammad is the problem is futile and disempowering. If these are the problems, what is the solution? To proscribe Islam as a religion and ban the use of the Qur'an?

Stereotyping Muslims and problematising Islam will only alienate Muslims and create an 'us versus them' situation, which is exactly what the jihadists preach and are seeking to achieve.

The pressure on the Nigerian church in general and Christians in northern Nigeria in particular is considerable. In the short term, evangelical movements like Lausanne should seek collaboration with local and international ecumenical and interfaith groups in an effort to end the violence and to build bridges across communities.

Many Christians in northern Nigeria, and the Pentecostal/charismatic stream of the Nigerian church in particular, would benefit from resources for pastoral and professional care and counselling. They would also benefit from deeper theological reflections in the light of a widespread prosperity gospel that offers very little in terms of dealing with suffering, persecution, and Christian presence and witness in conflict situations.

Lastly, 'de-secularisation' groups like Boko Haram may be calling the evangelical communion to a long overdue conversation about the effects of the secularisation of society and culture on religious commitment. In other words, there needs to be a serious conversation about what it means to be a citizen and a believer in a pluralistic nation state governed by secular democracy.

Europe: A most strategic mission field

Jeff Fountain

Europe, the nursery of world Christianity, has itself become a most challenging and strategic mission field. What hope is there for the continent that has been fundamentally shaped by the gospel, but paradoxically, also by its rejection? Europe, the most Christianised of all continents, has also exported atheism, rationalism, humanism, secularism, existentialism, communism, and plain ‘unbelief’ to the far corners of the world.

How then should we view Europe today? We evangelicals have often developed blind spots, distorting our vision of Europe.

Christians should be aware of how the Bible and the story of Jesus have been the most influential shapers of Europe’s past. Short memories breed short-sightedness and rob us of vision. To have faith for God’s future purposes we need to understand how God has been active throughout history, especially working through faithful minorities.

More recently, the vision for Europe as ‘a community of peoples deeply rooted in Christian values’ midwived the birth of what has become the European Union. Yet we evangelicals have too often watched critically from the sidelines.

We also need to view Europe beyond our nationalistic and denominationalist perspectives. Mostly we train our evangelical leadership to think local: ‘Christian leadership’ means pastoring a local church. However, where are the Christian training programmes equipping potential leaders for engagement in politics, economics, and all other spheres of life? Instead of embracing our responsibility to help shape Europe’s future, we have sometimes started with negative, disengaged attitudes influenced by popular eschatologies assuming God has planned for Europe to become increasingly apostate.

If the story of Jesus was the most influential shaper of Europe’s past, why should that not also be true of the future? We should ask ourselves: ‘What sort of Europe would please God?’ What vision for the future of Europe is preached in our churches, and what vision for Europe’s future will we bring to the table?

Europe today is experiencing serious crises in economics, politics, society, religion, and the environment. This should reshape the missions agenda of the European churches, for these challenges also present boundless opportunities for believers to respond with care and compassion.

Looking around, we should also note the different kinds of Europeans among whom we live. Incarnational mission will mean entering their world, just as Jesus entered ours. That could result in many fresh expressions of church.

If we are really honest, the most challenging Europeans of all are ourselves: average Christians! Our lives are often church-centred rather than kingdom-centred. Jesus wants his will to be done on earth, in Europe, in every life sphere. A transformed Europe will begin with transformed disciples, a transformed body of Christ.

Let us take another look at Europe—this time to see what God is doing. ‘Wheat and tares’ will always grow up together. We should focus on the ‘wheat’ and look for signs of hope, faith, and vision among the ruins. God is not finished with Europe yet!

Our hope is not based on circumstances or trends. It is grounded on God’s person and promises. The Christian faith is all about death and resurrection. It is a story of apostasy and renewal, over and over again. As people of hope, pregnant with God’s future, we look expectantly past today’s crises to see how the Lord of history will fulfill his purposes for Europe and the wider world.

The Path to Confucius's Ideal: Presenting Jesus to cultural Chinese

I'Ching Chan-Thomas

Although the Christian faith is believed to have reached the shores of China back in the 8th century, it is still generally perceived as a foreign or Western religion by many cultural Chinese today. Some even consider the evangelization of cultural Chinese a form of cultural invasion.

Today, although Confucianism is not the formal ideology of many cultural Chinese, its influence on their worldview, culture, and social life remains powerful and undeniable due to its historical significance. For example, the value placed on education and filial piety can be traced to Confucius's teachings about how life ought to be ordered.

Confucianism's pragmatic principles especially addressed the social dimension of human existence. Many labels have been given to what Confucianism really is, from humanism to a complex regimen of rituals, but essentially Confucianism is about how to better ourselves and society through self-cultivation and self-effort.

In view of the historical disrepute of the Christian faith among the cultural Chinese, one persuasive way to present the gospel is by addressing what resonates with their aspirations and values, especially with regard to human flourishing as defined by the ideals of Confucianism. This longing for human flourishing and the cultivation of a moral self present two great openings to express the relevance of the Christian faith for the Chinese culture.

While the Christian belief in original sin and depravity has always been alien and even offensive to many cultural Chinese, they can certainly identify with sin in reality, in their own lives as much as in the lives of others. Confucius's counsel of self-cultivation has not been able to bring about the human flourishing we hope to achieve.

The aspiration of human flourishing may be unattainable on our own, but we do not have to do it on our own. The path towards that hope is open to us in Christ. As we examine the gospel, we see it is about human flourishing. The Good News is that God has sent his own Son to restore the *shalom* that has been disrupted by sin. *Shalom* as expressed in Scripture incorporates not just peace but also universal flourishing.

Confucius's ideal of human flourishing very much reflects the *shalom* that Jesus came to restore. While Confucius was right in his prognosis of humanity's purpose, he was too optimistic about man's ability to perfect himself.

Jesus, the Son of Heaven, first atones for our sins so that we may be saved from them if we accept him. He also sends the Holy Spirit to help us live righteously and virtuously. In short, the gospel to the cultural Chinese is this: salvation from the penalty of sin and victory over its power in our lives, which consequently opens the way to flourishing and *shalom*. Instead of self-effort, Christ has already provided a way for us towards that end, which we may attain by trusting in him.

When the narrative of the gospel is presented this way, it avoids the common pitfall of being perceived as a foreign solution to the cultural Chinese's existential problem. Rather, it seamlessly corresponds with Confucius's ideals for humanity but with a realistic solution.

The Millennials: How to engage them in missional giving

Steve Steddom, Tom Harvey

The largest sub-segment of the American society, the Millennials (born 1980–2001) are coming of age. They will receive the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth in American history (estimated 58.1 trillion dollars) according to Pew Research. Nonetheless, compared to previous generations, they are more likely to be religiously unaffiliated and less likely to believe in God. Thus, the impact of this on how Millennials give and to whom is a growing issue for evangelical leaders.

Kari Dunn Saratovsky and Derrick Feldmann in their book *Cause for Change—The Why and How of Nonprofit Millennial Engagement*, note that Millennials ‘are quickly influencing how organizations communicate to all audiences . . . with an emphasis on authentic stories and visual presentations that are concise, mobile-friendly, and delivered online via social media platforms’.

They conclude: ‘Our research reveals a generation that is energetically trying to transform the world for the better. The mandate is clear: organizations cannot afford to cater only to older donors and volunteers. Younger audiences are demanding that the causes they support change the way they engage with them. We hope these insights can help organizations work with Millennials to unleash this force for good.’

However, Christian Smith in his book *Lost in Transition—The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, cautions that although the Millennials are disposed to altruistic motives, they lack the reasoning tools and skills to sustain interest in long-term benevolent engagement with any given project. Thus, ministries and non-profit NGOs feel the need to engage in marketing wars to become the ‘cause of choice’.

According to Smith, this deficient ‘moral imagination’ has left Millennials disoriented and morally confused. Smith admits there are many examples of Millennials ‘doing good’, but these examples too often create a wrong perception of this generation in general.

Both viewpoints offer key insights into understanding Millennials and philanthropy. Saratovsky and Feldmann help us to understand Millennials and the ‘how’ of giving, while Smith looks much deeper into the ‘why’ of Millennials and giving.

Both studies stress the primary importance of family and friend networks and the fact that emerging adults are ‘socially engaged’ far more than previous generations. The authors stress the importance of story or narrative as significant for Millennials. Both point out the importance of technology and digital connectedness. Finally, both authors caution against over-generalizing across the entire generation. Millennials are an important and thoughtful segment of society. The hand-off of the stewardship baton to this inquisitive and socially active group is vital in the endurance race of making Christ known.

They value and desire authentic, trusted relationships. Millennial giving to efforts of evangelism and discipleship will involve building trust by helping Millennials see the true impact of their gifts, as well as opportunities to give beyond the financial. If a Millennial donor sees their giving as accessible, engaging, and meaningful, more than likely they will let their peer networks know. When this happens, giving becomes timeless, transcendent of generations—when a friend invites us to come along, we follow.

As Christian leaders, we must take note of Christian Smith’s admonition to develop the ‘why’ of missional giving. Our messages of generosity and giving, especially to Millennials, should be based on a biblical theology of church mission that develops their moral imagination.

The time is ripe for a compelling and coherent vision of holistic mission for this Millennial generation: a vision that embraces the present realities of technology, globalization, urbanization, and racial diversity, and is grounded on biblical theology that seeks to maximize our time in the redemptive period of the biblical narrative.

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