Functional Education as a Panacea to the Wave of Rising Religious Terrorism in the 21st Century

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Abstract
This paper proposes functional education as a universal solution and all time cure to the wave of rising religious terrorism. The paper affirms that the 21st century is bedevilled with a rising wave of religious terrorism that has spread its tentacles round the globe. Call it Jihad, IRA, Al-Qaeda, Crusades or ISIS the terror it unleashes is no respecter of persons or nations. The article recommends that all solutions must be on table and all hands on deck to rid society of this evil which is on the rise.

Keywords: functional education, religious terrorism

Introduction
Education is a crucial tool for desired societal change, for moral, social, economic, political and technological development of any society. For this reason, the importance of education to the development, sustenance of the state, cannot be overemphasised. This means education is very important in enhancing poverty eradication, self reliance, national development and eradication of the ills of religious terrorism and indeed all terrorism that threaten our world today.

The menace of islamists that seek to establish an Islamic state across recognised international borders from Syria to Iraq, is as real as the numerous suicide bombings and bombings of public places as well as car bombings that plague France, Germany, USA and other countries of the world. The IRA is still on the march just as temple clashes rock Hindu and Buddhists communities in India, and Pakistan and seek to bring nations to their knees.

In Nigeria religious insurgency has given rise to the dreaded Boko Haram and its over five year war with the Nigerian army, insecurity of lives and property in north east of Nigeria and neighbouring Chad and Cameroon republics and it's unprecedented wave of killings, abductions and wanton destruction of property in the name of religion.

Studying the core of the world religions one is left without doubt that no religion preaches violence and apathy as a value.
The unwholesome extremist tendencies giving rise to religious terrorism of all kinds today could be linked to improper non-functional education and inculcation of wrong religious values. This paper proposes functional education as offering a universal solution and cure to the incessant wave of religious terrorism plaguing our world today from a Nigerian perspective.

Conceptual Clarifications

Functional education: The concept of education has been defined severally and differently by various scholars. Some philosophers view education from the Latin word “educare” which means ‘to lead’. Others have seen it as implying the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who have become committed to it (Peters, 1973). For Okafor (1984), education is a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain development of his potentialities and maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and to achieve thereby in perfect self-fulfilments. In like manner, Chauhan (1987) sees education as the shaping of behaviour, of modification of behaviour of individuals for adjustment in the society. Dewey (1963) had earlier described education as the scientific process by means which man studies the world and accumulates knowledge which leads to useful and intellectual living. It therefore serves as a means for meeting the needs of the society since it has to be transmitted from one generation to the next it encourages the socialisation of people into the socio-political system.

Functional education is therefore that education that achieves positive worthy results. It is an art of imparting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to someone or a group with the aim of bringing about a positive change in behaviour. It is about a deliberate or conscious attempt by persons or the state to effect a change in the behaviour of others by exposing them to certain experiences. It could be a way of transmitting from one generation to the next, the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society and the preparation of young people for active participation in societal maintenance or development.

Panacea: From the Greek ‘panakeia’ it connotes a universal remedy, a cure - all for any ill, problem, etc. This is to postulate functional education therefore as a cure, a solution, the only way out of the rising wave of religious terrorism for the 21st century.

Religious terrorism: If terrorism could be the systematic and organised use of violence and intimidation to force a government or people etc to act in a certain way or accept certain demands, then religious terrorism could be seen as a negative use of religion to control and coerce and to intimidate using the mechanisms of terror to induce behaviour otherwise not intended by persons or a given society. This is unacceptable in the 21st century when international and local conventions are all demanding the reasonable freedom of the human person as well as emphasising freedom of choice, press, speech and basic human rights. Functional education alone can put us on course.

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Religious Terrorism in Retrospect

Terrorism motivated by religious belief is as old as time, and several examples can be found in all major religions throughout the history of world religion. Religious terrorism can be traced back to the 1st century to stories in the Bible. In my years of experience I have found that religion is a heated subject that brings about feelings of all kinds and can lead people to kill or even die for their belief.

Religion can be understood here as a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of life and the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a supernatural agency, or human beings relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, spiritual or divine. Terrorism on the other hand is the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence in the pursuit of political change. All terrorist acts involve violence or the threat of violence (Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia, 2010).

Terrorism is specifically designed to have psychological effects beyond the immediate victims or object of the terrorist attack. It is meant to instil fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider target audience that might include a rival ethnic or religious group, an entire country, a national government or a political party, or public opinion. In general terrorism is designed to create power where there is none or to join power where there is very little.

Looking through history of terrorism through religions means one finds three kinds of religious groups that can be considered religious terrorism; the thugs cult, assassins and zealots.

The thugs cult— May be the only example of a terrorist group motivated entirely by a religious means. Thugs ritually strangled their victims as an offering to the Hindu goddess of terror and destruction kali, they sought to prolong their victims’ terror as long as possible as an important consideration in their sacrificial ritual (Burgess, 2004).

The Assassins— were motivated by both politics and religion. Their name literally means hashish eater and referred to the ritualistic drug taking they were rumoured to indulge in before missions. These missions usually involved stabbing to death politicians or clerics who refused to convert to the assassins’ version of Islam. The assassins differed from the thugs in that they played to an audience, often carrying out killing at religious sites on holy days, a tactic intended to publicise their cause and incite others to it (Burgess, 2004).

The term zealot in Hebrew means one who is zealous on behalf of God. The most extremist groups of zealots were called sicarii. These under their cloaks concealed a small dagger which they used violent stealth tactics against the Romans. In one account in Talmud the sacarii destroyed the city’s food supply so that the people would be forced to fight against the Roman siege instead of negotiating peace. They were also known to engage in violence against fellow Jews (Jewish Religious Wikipedia, 2010).

Not every religious group should be considered a domestic terrorist threat, but they do need to be looked at closely. There are growing number of millennium cults who believe that the years 2000’s could be the end of the Earth and are actively perusing ways to bring that about.

A close look at religious terrorism would also reveal a new way of defining the enemy. The enemy can best be identified through a description of the various levels of commitment among believers. Three are very notable here;

The Revolutionary Islamic vanguard: This is the most dangerous group; they are the ones willing to carry out the attacks on U.S. Embassies, religious purists who believe they are following examples set...
by Muhammad and his companions (The Rand Corporation for League of Women Voters, 2007).

The second group is larger than the vanguard and much harder to identify. Unlike the vanguard, they are not as committed to the ideological cause and have not crossed the line into violent action. However, they are willing to support both financially and morally the goals of the vanguard.

Third and last group is made up of nation-states and large organisations that are either supports of the vanguard or its objectives. Saudi Arabia seems the largest supporter of Sunni groups. Pre-Islamic society was known as a violent chaotic environment but it also extended unprecedented individual rights and freedoms to its people.

We must note that, religion and terrorism are a deadly combination. Throughout history there are stories upon stories of terrorism based on a religious motive and we still haven’t learned how to deal with it, they are continuing to come up with new ways to make history or to destroy people, places and things because of a belief that they may have. It is a scary thing to think of that there are several fanatics that feel that they can kill because their God says so or that they do so for the sake of their God.

A Critique of the Concept
Varying schools of thought have had different criticisms of the concept of religious terrorism and seek to express same from different viewpoints. Some hold that, a number of terrorist groups have portrayed their causes in religious and cultural terms. This is often a transparent tactic designed to conceal political goals, generate popular support and silence opposition.

A basic problem is whether religious terrorism really differs, in its character and causes, from political terrorism. Defenders of religious terrorism typically reason by applying commonly acknowledged moral principles, but the use (or misuse) of moral arguments does not in fact distinguish religious from non-religious terrorists, for the latter also rely upon such arguments to justify their acts. Political terrorism can also be symbolic alienation and dispossession, these are important in other kinds of violence as well. In short one wonders whether the expression religious terrorism is more than a journalistic convenience. It is also argued that news reports about suicide attacks are profoundly misleading; there could be little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any one of the world religious.

Religion is not innocent, but does not ordinarily lead to violence. That happens only with the coalescence of a political, social and ideological - when religion becomes fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements of political change. Religion is sometimes used in combination with other factors, and sometimes as the primary motivation.

It is also argued that modern religious terrorism must have the following traits:
1. The perpetrators must use religious scriptures to justify or explain their own violent acts or to gain recruits.
2. Clerical figures must be involved in leadership roles.
3. Perpetrators use apocalyptic images of destruction to justify the acts.

The Nigeria State and Religious Terrorism: A Case of Boko Haram
Nigeria as a member of the community of nations is not spared of her share of religious terrorism, most notable and recent of which is that of the Boko Haram sect.
Boko Haram founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf, the group’s name translates as “western education is forbidden” in the Hausa language. Yusuf who was killed by government force in 2009, instilled the group with extremist ideology, extolling a version of Islam where any interaction with western society is considered a sin. “Boko Haram is a way of thinking” says John Campbell, former U.S Ambassador to Nigeria. “They are a loosely organised grassroots insurrection against not only the Abuja government but the traditional Muslim establishment as well”.

After nearly a decade of violence, kidnappings and bombings rooted mostly in Borno state, and areas north east of Nigeria, Nigeria’s government still does not have an effective strategy for dismantling the group. The religious based terrorist organisation preys on the disillusioned Muslims of the north of Nigeria who are fed up with corruption and have few economic opportunities. Unless this changes by way of functional education which opens up more economic and social opportunities, the audacity of Boko Haram’s attack on the U.N headquarters in Nigeria just after 11:00 am on August 26, 2011, when a car strapped with a 100-pound bomb, accelerated up the long drive way and crashed into two security barriers near the buildings reception area and tore apart the building which houses 26 different U.N agencies leaving 23 dead and injuring scores will only be a prelude to future violence.

The Nigerian government’s current plan of increasing and arming security forces only militarises the problem, and any help from international forces will only increase local support for the anti-western terrorist group. Guns alone cannot attack successfully the real root problems of the growth of extremism in any country. The social menace of unemployment and corruption must be properly dealt with using functional education as a long and short term measure.

While Boko Haram was able to capitalize on Nigeria’s wide-spread poverty, ignorance and lack of economic and social opportunities occasioned by a non-functional educational outfit. According to Human Rights watch report, corruption in Nigeria has resulted in police abuse, human rights violations, a lack of healthcare, and political violence. A 2009 report by Amnesty International accused the Nigeria police force of hundreds of extra-judicial disappearances and killings each year, all of which have gone un-investigated. These disheartening factors of failed development combine to create a climate of desperation in Nigeria, especially potent in the North of the country. Few people feel they can trust the state institutions, establishing a perfect recipe for the growth of extremism of all kinds.

EDUCATIONAL SOLUTIONS TO RELIGIOUS TERRORISM

Formal and informal education could be used by governments to surmount the problem of religious terrorism.

In Nigeria, informal education could be used as done in other instances through programmes likes MAMSER, WAI, YOUTH CORPS SCHEME, Conferences and Workshops, etc. The formal is rooted in the national policy on education which came into being in 1977 and has since undergone series of revisions. The overall philosophy of Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2003) shows that Nigerian Government is fully aware of the need to foster unity and peaceful co-existence among the multi-ethnic and multi-religious groups and in this bid deter religious terrorism and insurgency. It reads;

a) Live in harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the
principles of freedom, equality and justice.
b) Promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding. Her philosophy of education is also based on
a) The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen.
b) The full integration of the individual into the community; and
c) The provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system, (NPE, 2003).

Based on this philosophy, the national goals of education include among others, “the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity” and “the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society,” (NPE, 2003)

Towards these ends, the Federal Government had since introduced many Education policies which are specially aimed at forging unity among Nigerians and a sense of nationhood.

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• The establishment of two unity secondary schools in each state to ensure that children from all states of the federation live and study together for a period of six years in order to promote friendship and understanding of each other.
• Quota admission system not only in unity schools but also in the public universities - ensures that admission is spread through all states of the federation.
• Educationally disadvantaged states policy - is aimed at equalising educational opportunities and fairness among all segments of the society.
• Nomadic education - which ensures that education, is taken to the nomads as they move from place to place.

Language policy in schools - the National policy on education lays emphasis on local languages encourages each child to learn a second one among the three major languages as a move toward further national integration.
• Introduction of citizenship education at all levels of the education system; and
• The establishment of agencies like Centre, for peace, Gender Studies and Religious Studies in universities.

It is this firm belief in the power of education as a veritable tool of achieving the national goals that informed Government’s huge investment in education annually. The Government also reiterates in the NPE (2003) that education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development because education is the most important instrument to change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution (P.7)

The federal Government also introduced Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 and Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 to equalize access to education. Translating these dreams from paper work to reality is another game entirely. The move is towards the ills of society including religious terrorism. War begins in the mind and ends when the mind is willing. The focus then should be on how to transform perception positively through education.

In many under developed Muslim countries, education is not widely available to all citizens. Many of the young people in these countries get their education in small religious schools called Madrasas that teach a strict fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law to their
students. The militant islamiats use these schools as a vehicle for recruiting potential terrorists.

The citizens of these countries have shown that they are open to new schools being built with funding and assistance provided by western nations. These schools encourage women to participate and teach a well rounded curriculum free of fundamentalist teachings. The resulting improvement in literacy and understanding of the outside world creates a more moderate point of view and reduces poverty and over population.

Education is key to lowering poverty, reducing infant mortality and slowing birth rates. Studies have shown that in countries where women have received increased education there are consistent results that improve the quality of life. Poverty rates and infant mortality drop substantially as education increases.

As economies grow and birth rates drop for reason of more and more women entering the work force, poverty and ignorance which are the motivating social factors that fuel religious extremism are also on the decrease.

It would make more meaning if much of the money spent on the war on terror were better spent on educating women and reducing poverty and ignorance in the places where terrorist are recruited.

The Challenges
The challenges to attainment of functional education by nations which will eventually convert to a panacea to the rising wave of religious terrorism are many and varied from society to society. However the common denominators might include the following:

1. Under funding of the education sector:- This has created a lot of tension and fuelled many crises in the system, resulting to student unrest and strikes at all levels. It has also affected supply and development leading to falling standards and leaving many as prey to religious terrorism.

2. Inadequate citizenship education:- Current systems of education that pay more attention to science and technology but are weak in citizenship education and history, do not encourage students to appreciate where they are coming from and so cultivate a spirit of patriotism that is devoid terrorist tendencies.

Religious based schools:- the encouragement of schools and universities along religious lines that is un-checked may not help in national unity nor solve the problems of morality but only encourage loyalty to church and religion instead of the state.

3. In-adequate Information Communication Technology (ITC) base:- The challenge of the 21st century is mainly on knowledge economy, and a nations class may be judged by the level of its ICT development. In this age where the social media is used for recruitment of persons into terrorists camps, the school curriculum at all levels should be given all necessary teeth to make positive ICT a priority and field for job creation.

General mismanagement; - A loud problem in the educational sector that manifest into religious terrorism is that of mismanagement in the area of funds, teacher supply, admission, examination, facilities, leadership and time, etc. Accountability is poor among teachers, students, school managers, government examination bodies and parents, (Ijaiya, 2003). In order that the educational system might live up to its responsibility accountability must be clearly worked into the system and enforced.

The Way Forward
Education of the populace as a deliberate
policy to eradicate religious terrorism must be embraced by all nations of the world. The United Nations should through direct and deliberate conventions encourage nations to adopt steps towards functional education in all its ramifications. Bigger and more developed nations should be made to assist smaller developing and educationally backward nations in their bid to advance education wise hence terrorism from wherever it emanates does not spare any one. Educationally disadvantaged communities must not be allowed to become recruitment centres for religious terrorists.

In Nigeria education by way of deliberate policies to eradicate the rising wave of religious terrorism must come top of the table as one thinks of a way forward. The present 6-3-3-4 or rather 6-6-4 system of education though good on paper has been poorly implemented. As a policy it is overdue for evaluation and review vis-a-vis its objectives. There is therefore need for another national curriculum conference that will re-evaluate and recommend a more manageable system for the country which would include the tenets of peace education aimed at eradicating religious terrorism from our national psyche.

Families and other stakeholders in the educational sector should encourage the non-formal tutoring of children at home towards a consciousness that seeks to eradicate religious terrorism and embrace a culture of peace.

Conclusion
Terrorism for Religious or secular reasons is abhorring and must be done away with. In this paper we have tried to point out that functional education is one major way to make this happen, but all other options must not be left off the table for the interest and future of humanity and our world.

References