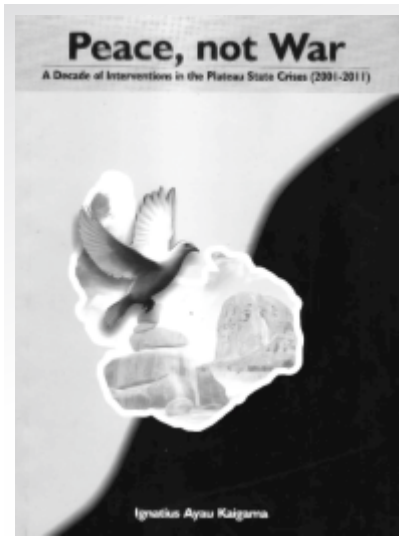


Book Review



Peace, not War: A Decade of Interventions in the Plateau State Crises (2001-2011)

Author: Ignatius Ayau KAIGAMA
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Reviewer: Matthew Hassan KUKAH

Peace, Not War is a collection of essays and papers written over a ten year period. The book is divided into seven sections. The editing of the collection was very carefully undertaken and the material is presented in a reader friendly manner. The first section is basically the Introduction. Section Two, titled Plateau the Beautiful, is made up of five chapters detailing the author's relentless trust and confidence in the natural beauty of the Plateau. Section Three is titled Counting our Losses and is a detailed narrative of fifteen interventions in which the author recaps occasional events in the various locations where violence erupted over the years. In some occasions, there are statements or comments that he made during visits to the scene of these events. Section Four, titled Attempts at Inter-Religious Harmony, contains nine chapters dealing with a range of practical interventions and encounters by the author. Section Five, titled Memoir/Interventions, again basically contains different statements responding to different situations in the crises. Section Six, titled Devotion to the Creator, is a collection of four interventions which focused on the call to prayer. Section Seven is made up of various Correspondences from individuals within and outside Nigeria largely appreciating the efforts of the author. Section Eight is the Conclusion where the author attempts a recap of his thoughts. Finally, the Appendices include a report of the attack on St. Finbarr's Church, Rayfield as well as other newspaper articles and statements in which the author was involved.

This book is a simple and easy read. Since the book is a collection, the reader does not have to start from the beginning but can pick and choose the themes or the incidents that grab their attention. However, from wherever one starts reading, I have found three issues that I consider to be of paramount importance in this book.

First, the book is dripping with the faith and the commitment of a shepherd who has not been swayed by the exigencies of the moment. Understandably, these trying times have divided and fractured many families, communities, and brethren in the faith. In any conflict situation, people will never see things the same way and the author has illustrated this point very well. On page 151, he seeks to explain how the crises have taken their toll on the members of the body of Christ. Now, he says, we are faced with empty religion and hypocrisy. In dealing with the violence, he identifies those he calls *fire for fire believers*, *indifferent believers* and *open and fair-minded believers*. The categorisations are of course self-explanatory.

Standing on the debris of the havoc at St. Finbarr's Catholic Church, the author stated:

We are saddened, we are terribly upset by this barbaric action and I know that no decent human being or religion will allow this. If we try to take the path of God, we may not administer the kind of punishment that God has in reserve for these wicked people. And that is why we Christians, when these things happen, call for calm. We Christians believe in Almighty God....So, I admonish you, don't take the law into your hands. It doesn't help. My dear young people, let us use reason (210-211).

For a community that is hyped up in anger and frustration, these words would have sounded so controversial as people sought revenge on the grounds that we have had enough, times when the temptation is to say 'let us teach them a lesson'. But, as the author illustrates, this is not the Christian way.

Secondly, there is the issue of the author, His Grace, towering above personalities, issues and politics itself in the way he approaches the crisis. In an environment of multi party politics where every serious politician wants to define their relevance by how close they are to a person of the status of Archbishop Kaigama, it is worthy of note that he has carefully remained above the fray and earned the trust and respect of all. Almost every account in this book is beyond the purview of individualism and personalities. The author never allows himself to be drawn into joining issues with groups or individuals. He condemns the sin not the sinner.

Thirdly and as a corollary, it is interesting to note that throughout this collection, the author does not address the issues of this conflict as a case of *Christians* and *Muslims*. Archbishop Kaigama has been deliberate in appreciating the fact that this complicated matter will not be resolved by the application of such a simplistic dichotomy, popular as it may be and sound. On page 199, he states: "I have always stressed that the crises have more to do with social factors than with religion". He does not spare President Obasanjo in his outright condemnation of the ill advised and ill-timed State of emergency which, with hindsight, is at the heart of the crises that this state has faced. The author makes this point on page 176 of the book.

We must admit that these are trying times for us as a country, as citizens and members of different communities. In the heat of this crisis, it has been tempting and even convenient for us to create a dichotomy in our analysis. However Archbishop Kaigama has emphasized that the struggle in the Plateau has been over such key issues as "who owns the land, indigenes vs. settlers, cattle owners and farmers and perceptions of injury and injustice" (p.200). There are, of course, as many more reasons as there are experiences. This will be the stuff of further research and history. However, in conflict situations, monocausality is a dangerous proposition to adhere to, for every crisis is the product of layers and layers of problems left unattended to. The narratives will never be the same. Our identities are in themselves not the reason for problems. Rather, it is the lack of imagination that has denied us a chance to develop the vision to manage identities for growth and progress. Security, rule of law, punishment of criminals in whatever sense, is the duty and responsibility of government not religious bodies. The persistence of chronic poverty has shown everywhere in the world that any nation that allows social conditions to deteriorate provides the raw material for violence.

Despite it all, for men and women of faith, these crises have opportunities. Archbishop Kaigama makes the point when he warned the Christian youth not to seek revenge because: "Those who are bent on doing evil, it is that same evil that will crush them one by one. We never taught you to be suicide bombers or to kill. We teach you to be concerned about your neighbour and we will continue to teach this" (p.212).

With the story of his profound and sincere friendship with the late Emir of Wase, Alhaji Haruna Abdullahi, the Archbishop has demonstrated that dialogue of life and genuine friendships are antidotes to prejudice which produces hate. If every one of us decides to develop some friendship with someone of another faith, we might find that it is the easiest way to enlist in the struggle for Peace not war on the Plateau in particular and Nigeria in general.