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CHRISTIAN ETHICAL APPRAISAL OF STATE AMNESTY AND NEGOTIATIONS WITH BANDITS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR JUSTICE, REPENTANCE, AND SOCIAL ORDER

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Abstract

This study offers a Christian ethical appraisal of Nigeria's amnesty and negotiations with bandits and evaluates how these actions shape justice, repentance, and social order. The problem arises from the negotiations, the granting of amnesty, and the reintegration of groups involved in kidnappings and killings into society. This act weakens security, emboldens bandits, sustains the violence, and raises fear of secret leaks. Existing studies rarely examine the moral crisis created by these actions. The study adopts Christian Realism because it guides a clear inquiry on justice and political responsibility. The method uses qualitative review of extant literature, personal communication, and pastoral insights. The study employs thematic content analysis. Findings show that the government negotiates with bandits, grants them amnesty and facilitates their community reintegration. This action damages justice and does not show repentance. The study recommends clear justice measures, true repentance demands, and firm steps that protect social order.

Key Words: Amnesty, Negotiation, Bandits, Justice, Repentance, Social Order

Introduction

Christian ethics examines human conduct through the lens of biblical principles and the teachings of Christ (Afunugo 2023a). It evaluates moral choices, actions, and social



practices in relation to divine law, conscience, and the pursuit of righteousness (Afunugo and Nwokedi 2023). The discipline interrogates the tension between human desires, societal norms, and spiritual obligations, offering a framework for discerning right from wrong (Chukwudebelu 2023). It situates moral responsibility within the community, emphasizing accountability, justice, and the common good (Afunugo and Nwokedi 2023; Afunugo 2023b). Christian ethics is not merely theoretical; it critically engages with contemporary social, political, and economic issues, demanding reflective and principled action grounded in faith and reason (Reed et al. 2024).

Christian ethics affirms the state's mandate to administer capital punishment in limited cases of grave wrongdoing as a means to defend human life and uphold moral order (McDonald 2023; Charles 2025). It demands just punishment that reflects the seriousness of crime and protects society from further harm (Humphreys 2022; Sambo 2025). It rejects any tolerance of evil that destroys life, disrupts peace, or legitimizes violence (Akerele and Dasaolu 2020). It denies moral approval to any practice that encourages crime or weakens the sanctity of human dignity (Hoose 2002). It frames justice as a necessary expression of divine order and human responsibility (Siddique and Hossen 2025).

The United States for instance, affirms a principle of not negotiating with armed bandits or recognized terrorists nor granting undue amnesty to persons who engage in kidnapping, murder or large-scale violence, viewing such concessions as encouragement to further crime. The United Kingdom similarly rejects ransom payments and blanket amnesties for terror-linked offenders, maintaining that accountability and prosecution are indispensable to deterrence (Taha 2023; Obe and Wallace 2025). The Israel likewise holds a policy stance against negotiating with groups it designates as terrorists or offering them sweeping amnesties, in order to deny legitimacy and incentives to hostile actors (Vanguard 2025).

Even when the United Nations, the United Kingdom, or Israel enter talks with armed groups, the engagement reflects pressure backed with clear state authority rather than weak submission (Jenkins 2018; Oluwasanmi 2025). Israel's talks with Hamas centre on hostages and are driven from a position of strength (Vanguard 2025). The contrast highlights the problem in Northwest Nigeria where calls for dialogue with bandits continue without any firm display of state control. The repeated appeal for amnesty rewards criminal violence and weakens public trust (Vanguard 2025). A credible response requires the Nigerian State to assert clear dominance, secure the environment, and push those behind the violence to request dialogue on the terms set by lawful authority (Toros 2008; Vanguard 2025).

In Northwest Nigeria, the government's choice to negotiate with bandits and grant them amnesty undermines social order because it signals weak accountability and rewards violent actors (Aina 2023; Mohammed 2025; Punch 2025; Agbedo 2025). The policy frustrates genuine repentance because offenders face no moral or legal pressure to renounce crime. It disrupts justice because victims receive no redress while offenders gain state recognition. This pattern encourages the continued spread of kidnappings and killings in



the region since armed groups interpret these concessions as proof that violence secures influence and material advantage.

This study examines the moral crisis that arises as the state in the Northwest region of Nigeria engages bandits through negotiations, grants them amnesty, and pursues their reintegration into society while violence persists. The need for this study rests on the failure of current policies to secure justice, produce repentance, or restore social order. The study aims to examine these actions through Christian ethical inquiry grounded in Christian Realism, assess their effect on justice and repentance, and evaluate their impact on social order. The problem lies in the state's acceptance of groups involved in kidnappings and killings and the silence in scholarly work on the ethical damage such actions produce. The gap concerns the absence of sustained Christian ethical analysis of state amnesty and negotiations with armed groups in the Northwest region. The study responds to this gap through Christian Realism Theory that clarifies justice demands and the need for moral responsibility in state action.

Literature Review

Existing literature critically examines the operational failures and structural dynamics of state-led amnesty and negotiations with bandits in Northwest Nigeria. Scholars unanimously document that these policies have emboldened armed groups, perpetuated violence, and deepened public mistrust, as negotiations often function as tactical pauses for bandits to rearm and consolidate control (Mohammed 2025; Aina 2023).

The fundamental flaws identified include the absence of genuine disarmament, a lack of community and victim inclusion in peace processes, and a failure to conduct individual risk assessments for so-called repentant bandits (Aina 2023). Further complicating these efforts is a misunderstanding of the bandits' fluid yet hierarchical structures and their multifaceted engagement with illicit economies, which enhances their resilience against military and amnesty interventions (Madueke et al. 2024; Maigari et al. 2021).

While some studies explore mediation tactics (Ojo 2024) and the political economy of amnesty programs (Agboga 2022), a significant gap remains: the absence of a sustained Christian ethical analysis interrogating the moral crisis where state actions undermine justice, fail to demand authentic repentance, and erode the social order by rewarding violent criminals. This study is justified and significant as it directly addresses this scholarly omission by applying a Christian Realist framework to appraise the profound ethical implications of these state policies.

Theoretical Framework

Christian Realism Theory is utilized in reinforcing the arguments of this study. Christian Realism emerged in the early twentieth century through the works of Reinhold Niebuhr in the 1930s and 1940s and the contributions of H. Richard Niebuhr and Paul Ramsey (Hyde-Price 2008). The theory holds that human sin shapes political life and that moral decisions



must confront the tension between ideal righteousness and the limits of human society (Bottum 2024). It affirms justice, order, and responsible use of state authority as necessary moral duties in a fallen world (Strand 2020). It rejects naïve optimism about human goodness and insists that public policy must face the tragic character of power and violence with moral clarity (Tyson 2023).

Christian Realism strengthens this study because it demands clear judgment on actions that reward crime or weaken public trust (Strand 2020). It supports the claim that negotiations with armed bandits in Northwest Nigeria signal moral failure when the state overlooks the gravity of killings and kidnappings. It stresses that justice cannot stand when violent groups gain recognition without accountability. It affirms that the moral purpose of government is compromised once its decisions erode the duty to protect life (Bottum 2024).

Christian Realism also reinforces the study's position that repentance must involve genuine moral change rather than easy concessions (Hyde-Price 2008). It denies moral value to amnesty that grants advantage to offenders who have not renounced wrongdoing. It aligns with the study's claim that the absence of moral pressure on bandits destroys the seriousness of repentance and sends a signal that violence yields reward. It places the burden on public authority to uphold moral responsibility through actions that reflect truth and justice (Hyde-Price 2008).

Christian Realism further supports the critique that the current approach threatens social order. It holds that order rests on disciplined authority and consistent justice (Tyson 2023). It agrees that weak responses encourage continued violence because actors interpret leniency as approval. It affirms the need for firm measures that restrain evil and protect the community. It validates the study's call for a moral policy that secures justice, demands real repentance, and restores civic stability in the region.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine the ethical implications of state amnesty and negotiations with bandits in Northwest Nigeria from a Christian ethical perspective. It reviews extant literature, official reports, and scholarly analyses to identify patterns in policy outcomes, moral deficiencies, and their impact on justice, repentance, and social order. Personal communication with clergy, community leaders, and security analysts provides practical and pastoral insights, ensuring that moral and spiritual dimensions are captured.

Data are analyzed using thematic content analysis, focusing on recurring ethical concerns, deficits in justice, and threats to social cohesion. The approach applies Christian Realism to critically evaluate government actions, emphasizing moral responsibility, genuine repentance, and the restoration of civic stability. This method allows systematic, ethically grounded scrutiny of state interventions in a context of persistent violence, aligning policy analysis with biblical principles and Christian moral reasoning.



Ethical Considerations

The study upholds Christian ethical principles in all research procedures. Participants engaged in personal communications provided informed consent, and their confidentiality and voluntary participation were strictly ensured. Data from literature, reports, and personal insights were critically assessed for accuracy and integrity, avoiding misrepresentation. The research maintained moral accountability by ensuring honesty, impartiality, and respect for human dignity. All procedures reflected the ethical standards central to Christian inquiry, guiding both the analysis and presentation of findings.

Justice, Repentance, and Social Order: A Christian Ethical Perspective

The major sources of Christian ethics are Scripture, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Christian tradition, reason, and the moral witness of the Christian community (Butner 2025; Grudem 2018).

Building on the foregoing assertion, justice entails treating human persons and communities with respect, equality, impartiality, and fairness, ensuring each receives their due through restorative, retributive, distributive, and procedural dimensions (Afunugo 2023c). Grounded in divine moral law, it requires love for God and neighbor, integrating primary justice through righteous actions and rectifying justice via proportional remedies like the *lex talionis* (punishment should mirror the harm done), while recognizing its ultimate fulfillment eschatologically through Christ (Keele 2020).

Societally, justice demands sufficient evidence of violations of this moral law, adjudication by constituted human authorities, such as family, church, and state, and the rejection of mob justice to uphold righteousness, though Christians diverge on the precise boundaries and responsibilities of these authorities in enforcing biblical principles (Hicks 2025). According to Christian ethics, justice further ensures that grave violations including violence, terrorism, wanton killings, kidnappings, and armed robbery are met with solemn and impartial punishments to uphold social order and deter future transgressions, treating such matters with the utmost seriousness and without partiality. Bible even recommends capital punishment for kidnappings and killings (Numbers 35: 30-31; Deuteronomy 19:11-13; Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7; Ajewole 2025; Spirit and Truth 2013).

Genuine repentance within Christian ethics constitutes a fundamental reorientation of the individual's entire being. This process initiates with a Spirit wrought conviction of personal sin, compelling an acknowledgment of its gravity before divine holiness. Such recognition produces a godly sorrow distinct from worldly regret, as it arises from the offense against God rather than the fear of consequences. This internal contrition necessarily manifests in the external act of verbal confession, an honest agreement with God about the transgression that rejects self justification. The individual consequently makes a decisive resolve to forsake the sinful behavior entirely, demonstrating the turning away that defines repentance's core action (MacArthur 2025; White 2017; Erbaugh 2017).



The ethical framework further requires this internal turning to yield tangible, external evidence. Authentic repentance produces a transformed life characterized by active obedience to divine commandments and the cultivation of righteousness. This fruit bearing includes making restitution for wrongs committed wherever possible, addressing the relational damage of sin. Critically, repentance remains intrinsically linked to faith in Jesus Christ; turning from sin is incomplete without simultaneously turning toward trust in his atoning work. The entire process is therefore a permanent, transformative re-direction of the will, securing a renewed relationship with God (Storms 2025; Institute in Basic Principles 2025; Boland 2023).

Christian ethics upholds social order as a moral condition rooted in justice, truth, and the dignity of every human person (Ukpe 2022; Thompson 2020). It affirms that a stable society rests on righteous leadership, respect for lawful authority, and structures that protect the weak from exploitation (Atkins 2025). It insists that genuine social order cannot stand on fear or coercion because such foundations violate human worth. It calls for institutions that restrain violence, punish wrongdoing, and secure fairness in public life. It also maintains that social order emerges where moral responsibility is clear, accountability is firm, and public actions reflect integrity. Christian ethics teaches that these elements shape a community where public trust grows and where moral direction is not left to arbitrary power (Rushdoony 2013; Nelson 1984).

Christian ethics also asserts that social order depends on moral citizens whose lives reflect truth, repentance, and respect for others. It teaches that inner transformation is essential because social stability collapses where personal conduct disregards virtue (Essien 2023; Reader 2011). It holds that believers must shape society through honest engagement in law reform, advocacy for justice, and service to those in need. It stresses that love of neighbor functions as a public duty that strengthens unity and reduces disorder. It teaches that a society marked by compassion and mutual care reflects divine purpose and gains moral strength (Brodowicz 2024; Sherwood 2002; Sherwood 1993). Christian ethics therefore positions social order as a collective responsibility built on character, justice, and active concern for the common good.

Interrelationship of Justice, Repentance, and Social Order in Christian Ethics

Justice, repentance, and social order stand in a mutually reinforcing relationship within Christian ethics. Justice provides the moral structure that regulates conduct and guards against the abuse of power, a principle grounded in Christian moral traditions as already expressed in this study (Bonhoeffer 2015). Repentance restores moral responsibility where injustice has fractured communal life, aligning individual conduct with a higher moral truth (Niebuhr 1964). Social order becomes more stable when justice is pursued with integrity and repentance addresses the moral distortions that erode trust. Christian ethics warns that societies disintegrate when justice is sidelined and repentance is absent, because moral disorder then seeps into public institutions and taints collective life (Wolterstorff 2008).



Repentance in both personal and public spheres strengthens justice and supports a lasting social order. It challenges people to acknowledge their wrongs, seek restitution, and recommit to moral truth (Bonhoeffer 2015). Justice gains force when offenders confront their failures and genuinely pursue restoration. Communities benefit because they do not merely punish, but heal. Christian ethics thus presents justice, repentance, and social order as intrinsically connected: justice gives public life its structure, repentance renews moral character, and social order is sustained where both guide the conscience of the community.

Stratified Banditry in Nigeria: Killings, Kidnappings, and Socioeconomic Drivers

Banditry in Nigeria functions as a stratified system of violent actors that vary in organization, operational reach, and intensity of violence. At the highest level are entrenched armed groups, primarily in the northwest, that maintain organized camps, control forested corridors, and plan systematic raids (Kolawole 2025). These groups are responsible for mass killings, large-scale kidnappings for ransom, and coordinated attacks on villages and transport routes (Kolawole 2025). Their operations disrupt governance structures, local economies, and community life, demonstrating persistence, strategic planning, and resilience against state intervention.

The second level includes semi-organized cells originating from local protection groups, herder communities, or former bandit factions (Thompson 2025). These groups conduct targeted killings, abduct villagers for ransom, and attack farms and rural settlements (Thompson 2025). While less centralized than top-tier groups, they adapt rapidly to local conditions, often collaborating with opportunistic actors or exploiting gaps left by law enforcement (P. Eko, I. Massah and J. Iliyah, personal communication, October 29, 2025). Their actions reinforce insecurity and complicate state response through their mobility and localized knowledge.

The third level consists of opportunistic actors who exploit ungoverned spaces for immediate gain (Madueke et al. 2024; Akinyetun 2022). These individuals or small groups commit sporadic killings, kidnappings, and theft, motivated primarily by short-term economic incentives rather than ideological or strategic objectives (Madueke et al. 2024; Accord 2022). Though their impact is localized, they amplify fear, destabilize rural communities, and create conditions that allow higher-level groups to operate with impunity.

Underlying these operational levels are critical social, economic, and political factors. Weak governance, porous borders, communal tensions, and competition over land and resources create fertile ground for banditry. Poverty and unemployment incentivize participation, while corruption and political patronage allow networks to survive (Ojewale 2024; Kleffmann et al. 2024). Understanding banditry through these stratified levels, combined with attention to systemic drivers, provides a methodological basis for developing targeted interventions that address both the manifestations of violence—killings, kidnappings, and raids—and the structural conditions that sustain it.



Amnesty, Negotiation, and Social Reintegration of Bandits in Nigeria

State authorities in northeast Nigeria continue to enter negotiations and peace bargains with armed groups, and the records show clear ethical lapses in these actions. Samson (2025) notes that leaders announce knowledge of criminal movements yet fail to act. He stresses that peace talks with terrorists offer only fragile relief. Jallo in Samson (2025) argues that the absence of ideology and central command among bandit groups makes such engagements futile and dangerous, as past peace talks in Katsina for instance, triggered reprisals and fresh abductions.

Awolabi (2025) and Kumolu (2025) present detailed evidence of state-led agreements, chieftaincy honours, amnesty offers, rehabilitation schemes, and community pacts across Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Sokoto, yet most collapsed and strengthened criminal networks. Adibe et al. (2024) contend that weak institutions encourage these failed bargains because loss of territorial control, low legitimacy, mass poverty, corruption, and poor service delivery allow state and non-state actors to exploit amnesty for private gain. These documents collectively show that negotiations with bandits are consistent, ethically flawed, and harmful to justice, order, and the credibility of the state.

The Nigerian state continues to operationalize large scale amnesty and reintegration programs for insurgents and bandits, yet the documented financial flows and enrolment figures reveal significant structural and moral concerns. Borno State budget papers indicate N6.0 billion spent on “repentant” Boko Haram members across eighteen months, including N3.45 billion expended between January and September 2024 from a N3.46 billion allocation and an additional N7.4 billion set for 2025; further disclosures show N2.6 billion committed in the first three quarters of 2025. This volume of expenditure points to a persistent policy choice with limited accountability (Sahara Reporters 2025).

Federal reintegration records demonstrate similar patterns. Operation Safe Corridor reports over 2,600 low risk former combatants graduated from the Mallam Sidi Camp and over 300 individuals undergoing rehabilitation as of August 7, 2025. Earlier figures confirm 893 admissions to the deradicalisation and rehabilitation programme, 280 reintegrations completed, and 603 participants scheduled for graduation in July 2020. These figures show a long running and resource intensive initiative that depends on sustained state endorsement without empirical evidence that it reduces future violence or prevents intelligence leakage once participants reenter society (Dera 2025; Premium Times 2020)

State level programs reveal inconsistent screening, divergent criteria for “genuine” repentance, and exposure of communities to security risks. Katsina officials announce support only for bandits who demonstrate credible repentance while establishing literacy and rehabilitation classes for reintegration, despite ongoing surrenders. Kaduna authorities welcome surrendered groups and commit to reintegration, even as the state records over 1,500 banditry incidents and more than 2,300 abductions between 2023 and 2024, raising questions about community safety and state discretion. These documented practices indicate moral failures in design and implementation, including weak vetting, uneven



monitoring, and potential exposure of communities and government institutions to compromise (Musa 2025; The Cable 2025; Anyanwu 2025; Oluwole & Abubakar 2025).

On November 16, 2025 at 1:24 pm, The Tribes, an Igbo Right Activist from Ali Ikwerre, posted a video on his Facebook page showing bandits entering a local government headquarters in Katsina State to sign a peace deal with the state authorities. The video shows the bandits firing AK 47 rifles into the air in open celebration (The Tribe 2025). This raises the critical question of whether such peace deals function as a temporary lifeline that allows armed groups to recover, reorganize, and later resume violence (A. Azum, B. Damberg and I. Johnson, personal communication November 16, 2025).

Interlocutors interviewed on November 13, 2025 stated that bandits often enter designated venues for peace negotiations, including local government headquarters and government houses across the northwest region, while shooting into the sky. These interlocutors argued that state governments in these regions accept such agreements out of fear and under conditions shaped by the power of the armed groups. They further asserted that the posture of the governments reflects a form of reluctant submission to standards imposed by the bandits.

Onyedinefu (2022) reports that a senior military officer disclosed under anonymity that several operational failures in Northwest regions of Nigeria; have led to the deaths of soldiers and other security personnel. He explained that after troops planned a raid on a terrorist hideout, the targets had already withdrawn, and the soldiers were later ambushed during their return. He added that terrorists often attack military bases when troops run out of supplies, which is made possible through informants who disclose troop strength, supply levels, and operational plans. He also stated that the conflict has grown more difficult because some officers allegedly collaborate with armed groups, while political sponsors continue to support these networks, which further weakens military efforts.

Abdullulayi Islamadi of Trust Television News in Katsina reported on November 18, 2025, at 10:24 a.m., that twenty of the thirty-four local government areas in Katsina State had entered peace talks with bandits. Citizens continue to lament that bandits still invade their farms, kidnap relatives, and kill innocent people despite these agreements. According to Islamadi, the pattern suggests that the governments approached the negotiations from a position of weakness, defeat, fear, and resignation. His report further indicates that such conditions may undermine the credibility of the peace process and call into question the strategic judgment of the actors involved. The account also underscores the need for a methodological review of the claims surrounding the peace talks to determine whether the agreements serve security interests or reinforce existing structural vulnerabilities.

Abdullah (2025) also reports that armed bandits ambushed soldiers and seized significant military assets; while Mumin (2025) notes that the recurring loss of soldiers raises concerns about internal leaks that expose troops to targeted attacks. These accounts, combined with sustained casualties such as the killing of seventeen soldiers in the Bangi community of Niger State, indicate a pattern in which bandits who were reintegrated through amnesty and



peace deals infiltrate security structures to obtain sensitive information. This suggests that reintegration processes in the northwest region may enable former combatants to pass strategic details to armed groups, leading to ambushes that weaken national security efforts (Abdullah 2025; Mumin 2025).

Furthermore, interlocutors on November 13, 2025 alleged that some bandits who have been reintegrated into communities in the northwest region leak sensitive information on planned military raids. This allegation implies a breach of operational security that compromises strategy and exposes troops to preventable risks. It also indicates that reintegration programs may be vulnerable when former combatants retain ties to armed groups. In view of these reports, reintegrated bandits are allegedly releasing critical information that undermines ongoing security operations and contributes to persistent instability in the region (Interlocutors 2025; Onyedinefu 2022).

Although the Nigerian military continues to deny the presence of personnel who leak operational intelligence on planned raids, reports of repeated ambushes persist and point to patterns that demand critical attention (Interlocutors Report, November 15, 2025; Abdullah 2025; Mumin 2025; Onyedinefu 2022). Evidence from multiple incidents as already posited in this study suggests that the concern is not directed at regular military officers but at reintegrated bandits who gain access to security structures and pass sensitive information to armed groups. These allegations indicate a security gap within reintegration processes that may allow former combatants to compromise military operations through deliberate infiltration (Interlocutors Report, November 15, 2025; Premium Times 2025).

Christian Ethical Appraisal of State Amnesty and Negotiations with Bandits in Nigeria

The documented actions of state authorities in Northwest Nigeria raise serious ethical concerns within the moral lens of Christian ethics pertinent to justice, repentance and social order as already articulated in this study. Government actors engage in negotiations, amnesty, financial commitments, and reintegration programs with groups responsible for killings and kidnappings. Records indicate repeated collapse of these agreements. These arrangements strengthen criminal networks across regions, reveal weak screening, inconsistent criteria for repentance, and unclear accountability. They expose communities to further danger and reflect a failure of authority to uphold justice with seriousness.

Christian ethics interprets these actions as threats to justice and social order (Ajewole 2025). They fail to address violence with moral weight, neglect the rights of victims, undermine trust in lawful authority, and allow violent actors to gain recognition without accountability. They weaken the moral responsibility of the state and encourage a cycle of violence, demonstrating that leniency produces advantage for offenders.

Christian Realism confirms this ethical judgment. It asserts that public decisions must confront the realities of sin and violence with moral clarity (Bottum 2024). It rejects policies that increase communal danger, insists that authority act with discipline and



responsibility, and maintains that order cannot persist where evil is not restrained. Policies must secure justice, demand genuine repentance, and restore stability in society. The detailed analytical evaluation is as follows:

1. **Misuse of State Authority:** Christian ethics holds that state authority is a divine trust intended to serve the common good (Hicks 2025). Amnesty programs that empower violent actors constitute an abuse of this trust. The state shifts protection away from victims toward offenders, distorting moral order and weakening legitimacy.
2. **Violation of Equal Moral Worth:** Christian ethics delineates that all persons possess equal worth before God (Afunugo and Nwokedi 2023). Negotiations that favor armed groups often ignore the suffering of victims. The state creates a false hierarchy of worth, prioritizing violent actors while offering minimal justice or restitution to victims. This ethical imbalance undermines social equity.
3. **Moral Hazard Through Reward Structures:** Amnesty policies generate moral hazard. Violent actors learn that violence yields state benefits. This incentive erodes moral accountability and encourages imitation. Christian ethics rejects policies that make wrongdoing attractive because such measures reshape societal behavior in destructive ways (MacArthur 2025).
4. **Erosion of Communal Moral Memory:** Communities depend on shared moral memory that records acts of evil and accountability. Negotiations that erase past crimes disrupt this memory, create confusion about right and wrong, silence victims, and hinder the formation of a truthful communal moral identity.
5. **Absence of Restorative Justice:** Christian ethics emphasizes restorative justice as moral repair (Afunugo 2023c). Amnesty programs often neglect restitution, reconciliation, or truth-telling. Offenders receive material benefits while victims receive no moral or material restoration. This absence deepens communal wounds and obstructs societal healing.
6. **Weakening of Moral Formation in Society:** Policies that reward violence undermine moral formation. Citizens, especially youth, observe that crime produces wealth, recognition, and political negotiation. Society loses moral direction. Public policy must cultivate virtue rather than encourage corruption.
7. **Breach of the Principle of Impartiality:** Scripture forbids partiality in judgment (Deuteronomy 1:17, 16:19; Leviticus 19:15; Proverbs 24:23, 28:21; James 2:1, 2:9; Romans 2:11; Colossians 3:25). Granting special privileges to violent groups violates this principle. It favors offenders while ordinary citizens who obey the law receive no equivalent protection. Such partiality constitutes an ethical failure and corrupts justice.



8. Compromise of Public Truth: Christian ethics requires truthfulness in public life (White 2017; Erbaugh 2017). Amnesty negotiations often involve secrecy, hidden deals, and ambiguous communication. This lack of transparency undermines public trust and weakens moral order.
9. Undermining Vocational Responsibility of Security Agencies: Security agencies have a moral vocation to restrain evil. Policies that reward offenders undermine this duty, sending conflicting signals to personnel and weakening morale. Leadership failure obstructs the ethical obligation to protect life.
10. Neglect of Covenant Responsibility to the Vulnerable: Christian ethics teaches that leaders bear covenant responsibility toward widows, orphans, the poor, and the vulnerable (Atkins 2025; Ukpe 2022; Thompson 2020). Banditry creates large populations of bereaved, displaced, and impoverished individuals. Negotiations without justice fail this covenant obligation, placing the weak in further danger and neglecting protection demanded by moral responsibility.

Amnesty and Bandit Negotiations in Nigeria: Implications for Justice, Repentance and Social Order

The practice of amnesty and negotiations with bandits in Nigeria presents a profound conflict with core Christian ethical principles. Justice, from this perspective, demands that individuals and communities receive their due, which includes impartial punishment for grave violations such as killings and kidnappings. The documented escalation of violence following negotiations, including reprisal attacks and fresh abductions, demonstrates a failure of this retributive and restorative justice. When the state negotiates with perpetrators of mass violence, it effectively denies victims their right to see wrongdoing proportionally addressed, undermining the moral foundation of a just social order.

Furthermore, these states led processes fundamentally misunderstand and misuse the concept of repentance. Genuine repentance in Christian ethics requires a Spirit wrought conviction of sin, a godly sorrow that leads to confession, and a decisive turn away from wrongdoing evidenced by a transformed life. The current amnesty programs show little evidence of such transformation. The rapid rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals without rigorous, demonstrated change reduces repentance to a transactional surrender. This approach ignores the necessary internal reorientation and instead rewards violence with financial incentives and political recognition, creating a moral hazard that perpetuates criminality.

The implications for social order are severe. A stable society relies on righteous leadership, firm accountability, and institutions that protect the weak. The consistent pattern of failed peace bargains reveals a state apparatus that is weak, illegitimate, and often complicit. When bandits are honored with chieftaincy titles or given large financial packages, it inverts the moral order. It signals that violent predation is a viable



path to political and economic power. This erodes public trust in governing authorities and reinforces a social environment where power, not moral law, dictates outcomes.

The financial dimensions of these programs highlight a further ethical collapse. The allocation of billions of naira for repentant insurgents, while victims remain uncompensated and communities insecure, represents a distorted priority. This resource allocation fuels a political economy of conflict where continued violence becomes incentivized. It also shows a lack of procedural justice, as these expenditures occur with limited transparency and accountability, further alienating the citizenry and weakening the social contract.

In conclusion, the Nigerian state's strategy of amnesty and negotiations with bandits stands in direct opposition to a Christian ethical framework. It fails to deliver justice, trivializes the concept of repentance, and actively damages the prospects for a genuine social order. This approach substitutes short term political calculations for the hard work of establishing rule of law, promoting moral character, and upholding the dignity of victims. A sustainable solution requires a return to the foundational principles of impartial justice, a true understanding of moral transformation, and the rebuilding of institutions that secure the common good.

Conclusion

The Nigerian state's approach to amnesty and negotiations with bandits in the Northwest region raises serious ethical concerns within Christian ethics. The analysis shows that repeated negotiations, amnesty grants, and reintegration efforts weaken justice and do not reflect genuine repentance. The study affirms that Christian Realism offers a clear lens for evaluating political responsibility because it directs attention to the moral weight of state decisions in times of crisis. This strengthens the view that a society cannot secure order when its leaders reward sustained violence.

The study does not claim to be exhaustive. It is limited by its reliance on secondary materials, personal communication, and pastoral reflections. It reflects the available documentation at the time of the study and acknowledges that access to state records and confidential security information remains restricted. It also notes that some regions affected by banditry do not have consistent data, which limits full comparative evaluation across the country.

The study suggests that further research should examine the lived experiences of communities that face repeated attacks and observe how these responses shape their trust in the state. Future work can also explore the ethical demands of repentance in public life and how religious leaders interpret these demands in conflict zones. Additional studies can investigate the long-term political effects of failed negotiations and assess how Christian ethical thought can inform state reforms on justice and security.



Recommendations

1. The Nigerian state must exercise its God-given authority by establishing decisive security dominance. This involves deploying overwhelming force to dismantle bandit networks and secure territory. A position of strength is a non-negotiable precondition for any dialogue and fulfills the state's primary moral duty to protect innocent life and uphold order.
2. Justice mechanisms must be re-centered on the rights of victims. The Nigerian government should implement transparent systems for prosecuting perpetrators and providing comprehensive restitution to affected communities. This fulfills the biblical mandate for impartial justice and ensures proportional consequences for severe crimes.
3. The Nigerian state must redefine repentance from a political negotiation to a demonstrable moral transformation. Amnesty eligibility should require rigorous, individual vetting and evidence of genuine contrition. This includes full confession of crimes, public renunciation of violence, and verifiable behavioral change, rejecting financial incentives as a substitute for internal reorientation.
4. Government policies must cease conferring legitimacy or reward on violent actors. The practice of granting chieftaincy titles, cash payments, and political recognition to bandits must end immediately. Such actions corrupt justice, incentivize further predation, and fundamentally invert the moral order.
5. Security sector reform is essential to restore its capacity to restrain evil. This requires enhancing operational capabilities, intelligence infrastructure, and personnel welfare. A professionalized chain of command, insulated from political interference, is crucial for fulfilling the vocational duty to protect citizens.
6. A truth and reconciliation process should be considered only after establishing security and judicial accountability. Such a platform would document atrocities and facilitate community healing. Its credibility depends on a foundation of truth and justice, not political expediency.
7. Governance must address the structural drivers of banditry. Combating corruption, delivering essential services, and creating equitable economic opportunities are critical. Building effective institutions undermines the grievances and illicit economies that sustain violence.
8. Religious leaders in Nigeria must consistently uphold a prophetic voice by advocating for ethical state conduct. They should guide their communities toward a robust understanding of justice and repentance, reinforcing the moral foundations necessary for a stable social order.



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