Revisiting אֱמֶת and חֶסֶד As Recourse to Security Needs in the Human-Ecological Zone: The Case of Nigeria's Niger Delta

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Abstract: *Like ancient Israel, the social-environment of Nigeria's Niger Delta, remains threatened as there is proliferation of social crimes resulting in some scholar termed "a society in total disarray with all community relationships dislocated." The paper adopts the Aquinas' paradigmatic theory of natural law which stresses the need to maintain law and ethical principle on which all creation (including humans) are ordered. It also utilizes the Historical-Grammatical method which emphasizes the socio-cultural and grammatical context of a text as an interpretative framework for the study of* אֱמֶת *('emeth) and* חֶסֶד *(chesed). It further employs the survey method to research toward generating the needed information from the Niger Delta people regarding the subject matter. This paper concludes that the Niger Delta region is confronted with security threats resulting from man's deviation from responsible relationships in the society. It further submits that revisiting such principles like* אֱמֶת *and* חֶסֶד *which deal with honesty, reliability, faithfulness, functional and efficient community relationship with value for lives, could indeed serve as recourse to security needs in the human-ecological zone especially the Nigeria's Niger delta region.*
Keywords: *Human ecological zone, Nigeria's Niger Delta,* אֱמֶת *('emeth) and* חֶסֶד *(chesed), Security needs*

I. Introduction

Andersen sees the failure of the religious people whose duty it was to secure the life of the community, as culpable for the social crimes in Ancient Israel- crimes of men against men which became detrimental to security and safety in Israel. Interestingly, Wolff opines that qualities such as- אֱמֶת (*'emeth*) - trustworthiness, and חֶסֶד (*chesed*) - mutual obligation are helpful for existence in any given society. Nevertheless, social-environmental security issues are not restricted to the ancient Israel. The earth generally, is faced with security threat, in such a manner, it has become of global concern. In fact, the converging of world leaders at the United Nations in September 2000, and their signing of the Millennium Declaration with the target of meeting among others, the Millennium Development goal of 'environmental sustainability' by 2015 , is an indication that there are security threat, at least, in the social-environment. Even Nigeria's Niger Delta region is not spared these threats. Like ancient Israel, "Africans (including Nigerians) are notoriously religious." And as such, her religious persuasions should permeate the society but on the contrary, the social-environment of Nigeria remains threatened, as there is proliferation of social crimes such as corruption, leading to what Hayes, had termed "a society in total disarray" with all community relationships dislocated, opening the floodgates of crime, and other forms of social vices. Still, there is the dominance of political elites, who say, "vie for power and control over the vast spoils of office"which has given them room to amass more wealth, as the poor get more impoverished. There are also money launderers,pervasive kidnapping and even the presence of subjugation and oppression of the poor, the weak and the marginalized, thus leaving the average Nigerian in a state of apprehension. This paper hypothesizes that the Niger Delta region is confronted with security threats resulting from man's deviation from responsible relationships in the society hence it adopts the Aquinas' paradigmatic theory of natural law which stresses the need to maintain law and ethical principle on which all creation (including humans), is ordered. It also utilizes the Historical-Grammatical method which emphasizes the socio-cultural/grammatical context of a text as an interpretative framework for the study of אֱמֶת ('emeth) and חֶסֶד (chesed). It further employs the survey method to research toward generating the needed information from the Niger Delta people regarding the subject matter.

II. Conceptual Clarification

Security is seen as the prevention of, and protection against assault, damage, fire, fraud, invasion of privacy, theft, unlawful entry, and other such occurrences caused by deliberate action . Therefore, security needs in this paper, refers to the need for the prevention of, and protection against assault, dehumanization, fraud, invasion of

privacy, and theft. On the other hand, "ecology" seen in Life Sciences & Allied Applications/ Environmental Science is the set of relationships of a particular organism with its environment. It is from the German *Ökologie,* from Greek *oikos* – house (hence, environment) relating to the environment and the way that plants, animals, and humans live together and affect each other. However, for the sake of this paper, 'ecology' is used sociologically as the study of the relationships between human groups in their physical environment. Therefore, the *human-ecological zone* here refers to the territory occupied by human population though not precluding other elements within the ecological zones.

III.   Background To The Israel Of The Eighth Century

At the commencement of the prophet's ministry, the Northern Kingdom was enjoying the prosperity and running into the excesses consequent on the victories of Jeroboam II. After the reign of the famous queen of Semiramis and her son Adadnirari III (810-783 B.C), the power of Assyria declined. Shalmaneser IV (782-773 B.C.), Ashurdan III (772-755 B.C.) and Ashurnirari V (754-745 B.C.) were weak rulers and offered no danger to the west. Under their pre-occupation with internal problems, Jeroboam II of Israel was able to extend his power in Syria almost unchallenged.

According to Unger the biblical notices dealing with Jeroboam's military proficiency plainly imply such a conquest, and it is supported by other lines of evidence proving the extraordinary prosperity of Jeroboam's reign. Moreover, excavations at Samaria have confirmed the splendour of the Israelite capital in the eighth (8th) century B.C. Artifacts show that Jeroboam II refortified the city with a double wall, reaching to as much as thirty-three feet in width in exposed sections, comprising fortifications so substantial that the Assyrian army took three years to capture the city (1Kings 17:5).

In addition to Archeology, Unger posits that Amos' prophecies give insight into the vastly increased commerce and wealth of Jeroboam's realm with consequent luxury and moral decline. He holds that tribute from a greatly augmented territory flowed into the coffers of Samaria and created a very wealthy class, consisting largely of the ruling strata and court favourites. Glaring social and economic inequalities were fostered by the selfish and unscrupulous conduct of the rich (Amos 2:6; 8:6). Simple dwellings of unburned brick gave way to "houses of hewn stone," and Ahab's ivory palace (decorations only meant) was imitated by many of the wealthy of the land (Amos 3:15; 5:11; 1Kings 22:39). Luxurious feasts were the order of the day (Amos 6:4-6). Religion degenerated into ritualism devoid of righteousness and morality (Amos 4:4; 5:5; 8:14).

He further holds that Amos had foreseen that this unhealthy prosperity, engendering a false sense of security and erected upon a flimsy foundation of moral and social injustice was not destined to be permanent. As a result, the house of Jeroboam was to be visited with the sword (Amos 7:9) and the people were to be carried into captivity (Amos 5:27), predictions which the next quarter of a century was to justify fully. Subsequently, about 746 B.C. Jeroboam died a natural death.

The twenty-one (21) years that followed the death of Jeroboam in 743 BC saw no fewer than six successive occupants of the throne, and the final disappearance of the kingdom of the ten tribes. Zechariah, his son, had reigned only six months when "Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him and slew him, and reigned in his stead" (2Kings 15:10). Shallum himself reigned only a month when he was in the same bloody manner removed by Menahem. After a reign of 10 years, according to 2Kings 15:17, he was succeeded by his son Pekahiah (2Kings 15:22), and after two years Pekah "his captain" conspired against him and reigned in his stead (2 Kings 15:25). This king also was assassinated, and was succeeded by Hoshea (2 Kings 15:30), the last king of the ten tribes, for the kingdom came to an end in 722 BC.

This initiated a period of sharp decline and destructive civil strife. Hosea must have lived during a great part of those turbulent times; so one may expect to hear resonances of those events in his book.

IV.   Exegetical Exploration Of אֱמֶת And חֶסֶד
אֱמֶת {*'Emeth*}

A fundamental principle of the Old Testament (Biblical) ethics is the imitation of God; as Yahweh is, likewise Israel is to be. This is famously expressed in Leviticus 19: 2 "Be ye holy because I, the LORD your God am holy." Even in the New Testament, this principle is evident (Matthew 5:43-48; 1 Corinthians 11:1). It is therefore no surprise that if Yahweh is faithful, it is expected of Israel that they should be faithful too. Sadly, in Hosea 4, the Prophet begins his general indictment of Israel. The first thing he identifies is that there is no אֱמֶת – *'emeth* (reliability) and חֶסֶד –*chesed* (mutual obligation) in the society. This form *'emeth* is of the nominal derivative of the root *'mn*. The derivation seems to be assured by the suffix form. The construct form *'amath* appears in place of the absolute form, for which there are any examples elsewhere. The word *'amath* was intentionally changed to *'emeth* because it was identical with *'amath-* 'maid.' Moreso, the *seghol* ('e') is changed to *pathach* ('a') when the accent shifts with the addition of the suffix. The word is found 126 times in the Old Testament. It occurs 37 times in the Psalms, 12 times in Isaiah, 11 times in Jeremiah, 11 times in Proverbs and 6

times each in Daniel and Zechariah. In other books, it appears from1-6 times each but does not appear in Leviticus, Numbers, some part of Genesis, and Joban poet.

In the book of Hosea, *'emeth* appears in chapter 4:1. In the LXX, *'emeth* is rendered ∀8Z2,4∀ (*alētheia*) and B4Φθ λ̄ (*pist s*) most of the time. And the Aramaic equivalent *qushta*ʾ have largely been responsible for the translation "truth." According to Baumgartner *'emeth* has several shades of meaning which he renders as "stability, reliability, durability, permanence, faithfulness" and "truth." Wolff sees *'emeth* to mean "trustworthiness." A word that denotes an unconditional reliability in which one has confidence in the other especially in his word, and service (see, 1 Kings 10:6; 22:16; Joshua 24:14; 1 Samuel 12:14). *'emeth,* according to him emphasizes the enduring quality of responsible relationships while *Chesed* underlines its intensity. He further holds that both words are often combined in a formula representing an indissoluble bond of loyalty. He succinctly states that the meaning of "there is no *'emeth*" in Hosea 4:1 is a lack of community responsibility among those who live together in the land. *'emeth* is frequently applied to God as a characteristic of His nature (Exodus 34:5-7). It is a term fittingly applied to God's words (Psalm 119:142, 151, 160; Daniel 10:21). It is a characteristic of God revealed to men. And as such, it becomes the means by which men know and serve God as their Saviour (Joshua 24:14; 1 Kings 2:4; Psalms 26:3; 86:11) and then, as a characteristic to be found in those who have indeed come to God (Exodus 18:21; Nehemiah 7:2; Zechariah 8:16).

The noun *'emeth* is the most common from the root *'mn*. It is often used of speaking the truth. The Old Testament usage of *'emeth,* takes on a wider moral implications. This word is often combined with a keyword of similar import- חֶסֶד (*Hesed*- the NIV 'Love,' RSV 'Steadfast love' etc.). Elsewhere, it is often linked with *cedaq* or sᵉ*däq>* (righteousness) and sometimes also *mišpat* ('justice'), and other moral terms. Similarly, *'emeth* is the firmness and the reliability of a man whose word is as good as his bond, one who is consistent in his responsibility.

חֶסֶד { *Chesed* }

The word *Chesed* connotes mutual obligation on the part of individuals or groups. It denotes human behaviour in the secular realm, religious sphere and especially as directed toward God. It is seen as the "essence" of covenantal relationship. It is rendered kindness, steadfast love, love, loyalty, faithfulness, mutual obligation.

Chesed also comes to feature in statement of moral or ethical. This noun *Chesed* occurs 245 times in the Old Testament. Its distribution by individual books is as follows: 11 times in Genesis, 4 times in Exodus, 2 in Numbers, 3 in Deuteronomy, 3 in Joshua, 2 in Judges, 3 in Ruth, 16 in 1&2 Samuel, 5 in 1 Kings, 15 in 1&2 Chronicles, 3 in Ezra, 5 in Nehemiah, 2 in Esther, 3 in Job, 127 in Psalms, 10 in Proverbs, 8 in Isaiah, 6 in Jeremiah, 2 in Lamentations, 2 in Daniel, 6 in Hosea, 1 in Joel, 2 in Jonah, 3 in Micah and 1 in Zechariah. It does not occur in Leviticus, 2 Kings, Ecclesiastics, Song of Songs, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai and Malachi. The word *Chesed* as a rule appears in singular. The plural is found only 18 times. *Chesed* is a relational concept. In Ruth 3:10, it points to the relationship of Ruth to her mother-in-law and to Boaz whom she prefers to the young men. It is a word used to demonstrate relationship among individuals. According to Jepsen, *Chesed* "always designates not just a human attitude but also the act that preserves or promotes life." It is demonstration of friendship or piety.

VanGemeren[holds that *Chesed* is not a mechanical tool to be used in crises, nor is it a philosophical absolute to be taken for granted, but rather a quality of relationship that is to be sought again, appropriated and treasured in the covenantal partner's every needy moment. It is therefore clear that the concept lies in the realm of interpersonal relationship. With relation to בְּרִית (*bᵉrith*) -covenant- *Chesed* is practically defined as the very content of בְּרִית (*bᵉrith*) and as "conduct in accordance with the mutual relationship of rights and duties between allies As in Hosea 4:1, it could be referred to "conduct towards other human beings." The social nature of *Chesed* need not be overemphasized because *Chesed* shapes not only relationship with human beings, but also that of human beings among themselves. As earlier on stated, the "knowledge of God" according to Wolff, does not refer to a second "religious" sphere in addition to the "ethical" of the first two concepts (of אֱמֶת and חֶסֶד, as seen in Hosea 4:1) but as a concept in final position of the phrase, it is rather the root and the source which make אֱמֶת and חֶסֶד in Israel possible.

V. Survey On Security Threat In The Human-Ecological Zone Of The Niger Delta
TABLE 1: Security threat indicators in the Nigeria's Niger Delta Region

S/N	TEST ITEMS	Agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)	Total
1	Corruption does not exist in my community	43 (7.4)	27 (4.6)	512 (87.8)	582 (99.9)
2	There is a concrete cordial relationship among people in my community	139 (23.8)	52 (8.9)	391 (67.1)	582 (99.9)
3	People in my community have always been faithful to keeping agreements	101 (17.3)	62 (10.6)	417 (71.5)	580 (99.5)
4	Kidnapping and Cursing is a non-issue in my community	87 (14.9)	41 (7.0)	450 (77.2)	578 (99.1)
5	the incidences of shedding innocent blood has never been rampant in our society	49 (8.4)	38 (6.5)	496 (85.1)	583 (100)

From the survey carried out among respondents in the Nigeria's Niger Delta region on security threat in the Region, 87.8% respondents agreed that dishonesty and corruption exist in their community. This response echoes Okogbule's view which holds that corruption and dishonesty "are universal tendencies that have always existed in every land (including Nigeria's Niger Delta region)." Furthermore, in the book of Hosea, portray the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as a marriage, and condemned the Canaanite fertility Cult with the use of the word נָאַף -'adultery'. But a critical study of Hosea proves otherwise hence, their affirmative response on the existence of 'corruption', sheds light on Birds' position that זָנָה (also translated adultery, fornication, whoredom or prostitution Hosea 5:4) used by Prophet Hosea, is the "spirit of corruption" emanating from the State.And the existence of corruption in any given society, constitute a serious threat to the security of such environment. Furthermore, this whopping 87.8% of respondents' view concurring to the fact that corruption is a part of their everyday life could further be understood by carefully observing the Land Use (Prohibition of Extortion) Law No. 5 of 2010 a law enacted by the House of Assembly of one of the States in Niger Delta to prohibit extortion of landowners, land developers, contractors working at land site and operators of business premises, and for matters related thereto. The Law got the assent of the Governor of the State, Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi on 17th July 2010. The Law is divided into eleven (11) sections. However some sections very instructive are stated below:

"…notwithstanding any tradition, custom or usage with respect to use of land, no person shall demand or receive payment of any tax, levy, fee, license or similar kind, or any other item other than money from a landowner, land developer, contractor working at a land site or operator of business premises, whether the payment is for customary appeasement, bush-entry, matching ground, community development, youth development, operational permit or for any similar purpose, whatsoever name called; provided however, that the exemption of the collection of bush-entry as specified…does not affect the collection of bush-entry by actual land-owner or seller in the case of communal lands; by harassment, intimidation, molestation, assault, coercion or threat of force, demand or extort money from a land-owner, land developer, contractor working at a land site or operator of business premises, for any purpose …."

The above sections of the legislation, imply the presence of extortion of money and or other valuables by group of people (through intimidation, harassment, molestation assault, coercion and threat) from landowners, land developers, contractors and operators of business premises, with several sobriquet like "bush entry" or "matching ground" as the case may be. This legislation further suggests that this form of corruption is rather a "tradition" or "custom." In fact it has become an attitude or a perpetual means of livelihood at the expense of their victims with its attendant consequence on the environment.

In a nutshell, one could say, in line with Mays regarding the economic mishap on land in the Niger Delta region, that "these fellows had already sunk to the level of a chaotic society due to the proliferation of such vices as corruption that no moment was left free of their crime as one corrupt deed followed another" (Hosea 4:2b). In other words, there could be dislocation in any given society where there is the lack of mutual communal responsibility- חֶסֶד (*chesed*) which in other places of the scriptures is often linked with *cedaq* or s^edäq> (righteousness) and sometimes also *mišpa†* ('justice'), and other moral terms. Summarily, corruption breeds insecurity.

Response to the Test Item 2 further complicates the issue as the majority 391 (67.1%) of the responses attests to the lack of mutual community responsibility which aids proliferation of social vices. Accordingly, VanGemeren holds that mutual community responsibility is not a mechanical tool to be used in crises, nor is it a philosophical absolute to be taken for granted, but rather a quality of relationship that is to be sought again, appropriated and treasured in the covenantal partner's every needy moment. It is therefore clear that the concept

lies in the realm of interpersonal relationship. Butterweck further sees mutual community responsibility as the very content of בְּרִית (b*e*rith) (covenant that binds a community together) and as "conduct in accordance with the mutual relationship of rights and duties between allies. The social nature of this responsibility need not be overemphasized because it shapes not only relationship with human beings, but also that of human beings among themselves.

Response to Test Item 3 in Table 1 under the appendix shows that unfaithfulness thrives in the society. Of the 580 valid responses, 417 (71.2%) agreed to the fact that people in their society are not reliable. This could further inform the lack of community mutual responsibility (see test item number 2). Accordingly, Wolff sees *faithfulness* as a word that denotes an unconditional reliability in which one has confidence in the other especially in his word, and service. Moreso, to him, the word emphasizes the enduring quality of responsible relationships. And as such, it becomes the means by which men know and serve God as their Saviour and then, as a characteristic to be found in those who have indeed come to God. Also, of the 578 (99.1%) valid responses, 450 (77.2%) believe that kidnapping and cursing are issues in their community as against 87 (14.9) who disagree to that fact and 41 (7.0%) who are not sure if kidnapping and cursing do exist, respectively.

This overwhelming affirmative majority response further serves as indices to the "lack of knowledge of God." Moreover, 'kidnapping' here, which is the Hebrew גָּנַב may refer to normal theft of property, where the law adds that two witnesses are required. It may also mean to "create a false impression or delude." If the crime of גָּנַב (kidnapping) takes place in the sight of the owner of property, then it is robbery which also includes the loss of dignity inflicted on the owner, a personal sense of affront. In essence, גָּנַב could mean: robbery, theft, kidnapping, and stealing. According to Berry (et.al) humans are directed toward having understanding of the environment and how they should relate to it, based on observation, study and an ethical approach to decision making and stewardship. They state that the earth is God's not ours therefore; we have no right to exploiting the world. Creation, to them is seen as God's. In other words, what the authors imply is that there is a nexus between the attitude of man (as expressed in relationships) and ecological wellbeing.

The Decalogue prohibition against גָּנַב with a simple apodictic formula (Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19) is more likely, the command of a general dictum against the taking of anything that belongs to someone else or to the community at large. This could also be extended to the protection of the natural resources of this world and the dignity and reputation of people. So, the presence of גָּנַב - kidnapping, stealing, theft, and stripping of human dignity- in the society further proves a threat to human security in the Niger Delta society- indication of social disorder. Accordingly, Dada seeking for societal transformation surveyed the activities of Prosperity Gospel exponents and thus presents the underlying words:

These preachers should rather be the outspoken champions of the poor in their demand for social justice… As earlier observed, socio-political and economic problems of our country are results of structural injustice. There is more in our nation for everybody's need, but majority is denied their rights, because of greed and avarice of the few, who claimed to be leaders.

From Dada's excerpt, he identifies the fact that the poor, the marginalized seeks social transformation. He attributes the socially-security threatening state of the nation to greed- a strong desire and quest for more wealth at the detriment of the poor and marginalized. In other words, he identifies the root cause of country's social malady as greed. Although Dada's quest in this regards is for social transformation, it may not be out of place to state that the environmental crisis in the Niger delta could be linked with the social rottenness, which has its root in the neglect of the Christians' responsibility in maintaining right relationship with others, which has posed a threat to security of lives and property. In a nutshell, if there exist a cordial relationship between the leaders and the lead of a given society.

Judging from the 583 (100%) valid responses where 496 (85%) of the responses affirm that there has been rampant shedding of innocent blood in their society as against 49 (8.4%) and 38 (6.5%) who disagree and are not sure respectively, we can also state that there has been in this society a deep-seated social disorder that has little or no regard for human life.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, the failure to abide by "Natural Laws" (which deals with proper way of living in a given community) is regarded as "sin of omission" which gives birth to proliferation of crimes in the society. We can therefore state affirmatively, that the "lack of אֱמֶת and חֶסֶד which could be an outright ignoring of natural standards for communal living, constitute a grave threat to Security in the human- ecological zone and even in the natural world since this same standards are needed to also protect animals as well since they are not objects that can simply be exploited but are also part of the community. This paper therefore submits that revisiting such principles like אֱמֶת and חֶסֶד which deal with honesty, reliability, faithfulness, functional and efficient community relationship with value for lives, could indeed serve as recourse to security needs in the human-ecological zone especially the Nigeria's Niger delta region.

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