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Dynamics of Religious Violence in Nigeria and Implications on Peace: A Missiological Reflection on Violent Response to Inter-Religious Tensions in the North

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Abstract

Nigeria currently grapples with dynamics of religious violence, which continues to take a debilitating toll on the people. Although the country is no visitor to inter-religious violence which initially was more pronounced in the north, but now spreads the Middle belt, of the country related to religion, which in the last forty years has claimed thousands of lives. The current situation is unique in terms of the nature, geographical scope and terrorist dimension of the violent insurrection led by, but not limited to, the militant Islamist sect Boko Haram and now unabated attacks of armed Fulani herds' men across the country particularly in the Middle belt, Southern Kaduna, Niger, Plateau, Benue, Kogi, Taraba and Adamawa States. Between August and September alone there was mindless killings of indigenous Christians in Southern Kaduna assumed a genocidal magnitude on Christian communities where over 120 persons including infants, and women have been killed. With scores injured, thousands were displaced from their villages and farmland by armed Fulani militia without any care from Kaduna State and the federal Government. The purpose of this article is to show that the current situation has implications on peace in Nigeria is a part of an enduring and evolving wave of religious rights violations that continue to thrive unresolved. The theological and missiological argument is that both structural and direct violence against Christians in northern Nigeria and in other central states of the country are linked. The article also highlights the responses of the Nigerian Christian community to persecution. In the final analysis, it is important to acknowledge that there are many among Christians and Muslims who share the vision of living in peace with one another. This can be encouraged if the two religions work to discard stereotypes against each other. By doing so, the clamour for greater religious freedom is likely to become a joint project for adherents of both religions and other citizens who embrace the possibility of peaceful coexistence.

Key words: Nigeria, religion, violence, missiology, ecclesiology, peace, theology, northern Nigeria

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Introduction and Background

This article employs a theological-missiological approach to examine the inter-religious violence in Northern Nigeria, with the aim to help Christians in Nigeria, Africa respond to inter-religious violence as a means to contribute to global missiology. It traces the events of how Christians in Northern Nigeria struggled with the problem of religious violence and how it has hindered peaceful co-existence for ages till today. The research proposes an approach to violence that encourages the general body of believers everywhere in the world to resist counter violence of any sort during turbulent times. Some Christians exhibited considerable endurance and restraint by dying as martyrs because of their faith in Christ in any form of religious violence. But there are Christians who argue there is no third check to turn hence counter violence becomes an acceptable option. There is a need for ecclesiology learn to listen and respond appropriately to the cries of those who are suffering violence. Thus, this research presents nine principles as better approach to religious violence.

Statement of the Problem

Since the early 1980s, Jos, one of the cities in Northern Nigeria, has experienced multifaceted violence and is an example of many other cities with similar stories. In particular, an almost unthinkable scale of mayhem and death shattered Jos' normally peaceful atmosphere as hundreds were killed in September 2001. Eitel (2008:25), notes that "Some outside reporting characterized the debacle as "religious violence" Boer (2003:34) recounts that, "a group of Muslims who took it upon themselves to stop cars along major roads in northern Nigeria during the 2001 religious crises, and force their passengers to recite the *Shahada* Islamic Creed." Minchakpu (Minchakpu2004:17), says that "those passengers, who were unable or unwilling to recite the *Shahada*, were beaten or killed" The response that followed this event was an eye for an eye response. Oguntola (2011:14), notes that the principle of an "eye for an eye" appears to be a regular method of responding to violence as Nigerian Christians abandon "cheek-turning," arguing they have no more cheeks to turn." Christians vowing to match blood for more blood together some pastors' approval of the self-defence response to violence has strained the retaliations between Christians and Muslims. Scott(2000:38), notes that "while religious wars seemed at one point to be a thing of the past, history has shown that violence related to religion is instead increasing both in quality and in vehemence" (Scott 2000:38). Scott (2000:39), continues that "Violence has been inflamed by religious motivations among Christians and Muslims." Gofwen (2004:1), alleges that "today, religion in modern Nigeria is divided between a Christian culture and a radical Islamic culture. Each phenomenon builds on the unresolved issues of previous outbreaks resulting in the deaths of thousands." Gofwen (2004:88), emphasizes that "Repeatedly churches, mosques, hotels, shops, petrol stations, individual homes, and lives have been destroyed causing tremendous financial hardship on the usually uninsured owners."

Many people have been injured, and hundreds more carry emotional scars, which hardly heal as almost annually another round of bloodshed results in fresh losses. Religious

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violence between Muslims and Christians characterize Northern Nigeria. This has raised the question of how the relationship between religions and violence has shown how important it is for one to think about it. One wonders what has propelled this violence in these major religions. Gofwen (2004:88), makes a passionate comment that “one wonders if religion promotes violence and if it offers any resources for hindering peaceful coexistence? Christians who once advocated for pacifism speak of “no more cheeks left to turn” It is believed that the shift from pacifism towards self-defence developed as a result of the Kafanchan and Kaduna religious violence which began in March 1986. Oguntola (2011:14), notes that “Christians in central Nigeria and in Northern cities mobilized to defend themselves, organizing vigilante groups to respond to terrorist attacks”

A critical question for theologians and missiologists to ask always is what is the central intellectual heresy in every faith that values death over life and allows otherwise decent people to turn into salivating storming killers in the name of religion or God? Answering this question appropriately can motivate Christians to develop their understanding on why such violence occurs and how Christians can respond to this.

Nature of Violence

To begin to understand the complex nature of the intersections of religion, and violence in the context of Nigeria, one needs to have a working knowledge of literature in each of these fields. Cavanaugh (2009:56), argues that “those who discuss religion as inherently violent rarely define religion well, if at all. Even if they do, there is little proof presented as to why religions should be considered inherently violent or why religions should be singled out as fatally aggressive.” Cavanaugh’s perspective has implication in context of Nigeria in a sense that both Christians and Muslims preach their religions promote peace and not to kill. But until today inter- religious violence which results to constant conflict between both religious groups has been in existence for long.

Hastings (1999:231) affirms this by noting that “conflict in the last part of twentieth century has often been focused on the Sahalian belt of countries like Sudan and Nigeria.” Kippenberg (2011:38), argues that, “there is no necessary link between religious beliefs and violence. Religious violence comes neither from religions nor from secular government policies” Kippenberg (2011:38), explains that “instead, religious violence comes from tension between religious communities and governmental, legal, and economic structures intersecting with each other” Furthermore, Avalos (2005:22) argues that “religion is inherently violent. Religion creates the conditions for violence by creating scarcity that would not otherwise be there.” Narrating his view in writing in line with what is ongoing in Nigeria, Hastings (1999:1247) thinks that, “those who have experienced violence know that it is not pleasant, and would always prefer that there be no mention of violence in any given society.” Hastings (1999:1247) affirms that “Violence has always been present in society and may always be so until humankind shares identical intellectual convictions.” Thompson (2003:136) notes that, “the continent of Africa is filled with conflicts, wars from south to north, west to east, fighting burns or simmers in Africa”

From these perspectives, violence is a problem that the church needs to address if she is to preach the gospel in a nonviolent environment. Indeed, the church in Africa has to create an understanding concerning the nature of this violence in order to respond properly to its challenges. Violence has been a serious threat to the church and at the same time a global missiological problem which has confronted Christians both in Northern Nigeria and elsewhere in the world throughout history.

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Origins of Violence

In the beginning, God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1: 26, 27). However, man's sin corrupted God's plan from that perfect and peaceful existence (Genesis 3: 8-14) and the perfect peace was destroyed. However, Yahweh promised hope of a future peace wherein humankind will experience the restoration of peace (Genesis 3:15). God told Adam and Eve to depart from the peaceful garden into a life full of chaos (Genesis 3:23). Therefore, the life that God created for peaceful living was soon battered by violence (Genesis 4:8). From then onwards, histories of mankind became characterized by conflicts and violence. This violence continued to progress in human life until God ended the world in which Noah and the people of his own society lived (Genesis 6:11). Kleinig (2003:412), notes that "God forbade any person who had been injured to hate the offender secretly in his heart. Instead, he was required to confront the offender openly and directly with his offense." With regards to the Israelites, God an Israelite to rebuke his fellow Israelite to give him a chance to admit his wrongful deed and put it right. If, however, anybody failed to reprimand the wrongdoer, but hated him instead and plotted his downfall, that person became a party to that evil deed. Hatred of the wrongdoer turned the victim into a wrongdoer. It devoured the hateful person.

In the Psalms, the subject of violence is directed to questions and laments. The Psalmist raises a theological question, "Why, O, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (Psalm 10:1). Although the Psalmist recognizes God's presence, the Psalmist confidently prays that God will root out those who are wicked and take advantage of the weak and poor throughout Israel so that the wicked may not strike violence anymore (10:18). Such behaviour, David reminds us, will be called to account.

There is hope, however, whether a person have taken advantage of the weak or have been victim of oppression. The Lord has compassion on those oppressed by sin. The Psalmist cries to God to "break the arm of the wicked and evildoers" and eradicate violence that resonates in the world (10:15). Chilton (2008:46) points out that this "is part of biblical heritage at the heart of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam."

The teaching of nonviolence moves to the New Testament where the people of God are aliens, pilgrims, and ambassadors among the nations of the world (2 Corinthians 5:18). The Church in Jesus' time struggled with violence; the church in Nigeria as well, has been struggling with violence. Piper (2009:20, 21) wrote, "Martyrdom is not the mere consequence of radical love and obedience; it is the keeping of an appointment set in heaven for a certain number." Piper (2008:20, 21) "wait till a number of martyrs is complete who are to be killed."

Personal Testimony

The unforgettable *Dogo Nahawa* experience can serve as an example for understanding religious violence and its consequences. The violent event occurred in the wake of April 2009 when some fanatical Fulani herdsmen descended on an entire Christian community in *Dogo Nahawa* town in Jos South local government, Plateau State, Nigeria. It was a terrible night and a ghastly sight to behold the next day. The entire Christian community was taken by surprise. Their houses were burnt down, and Men, women and children were ambushed and slaughtered like animals. Today, the violence has left *Dogo Nahawa* orphans in perpetual pain tormented by the horrible fate meted on their parents.

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How do we relate this event with a thorough understanding of violence? Two words, *khamas* and *shodh* are used in Hebrew to render the English word “violence.” In English, violence carries the meaning of:

Using physical force so as to injure, damage, roughness in action and negatively as the use of force, or power, as in deprivation of rights, and brute strength that inflicts pain, injury, cruel or unjust action, with hostile intent (Webster1999:1595).

It is possible to experience violence yet be ignorant of it. A pastor from the northeast of Nigeria held to an extremely circumscribed view of violence denying the presence of religious violence because he had not personally seen any cases of physical brutality even though his church, under a religiously oppressive governor, was denied access to worship. That same governor had demolished many worship places in the district for which that pastor was a leader. Yet, it is not only oppression from those in authority. It is well known that in certain parts of Jos in Central Nigeria, despite the city being predominantly Christian, worshippers are forced to travel to church using complex and varying routes in order to avoid confrontation and probably death. Schlossberg (1990:17), maintains that “similar responses are common among Christians in other regions of the world, including areas where religious freedom may be the law, but in practice, Christians are still subject to a wide range of violence.”

The definition of violence by Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson (2001:27), underscores a theological meaning of religious violence towards Christians and encompasses a broad idea of violence. These authors highlight that violence is “any unjust action of varying levels of hostility perpetrated primarily on the basis of religion and directed at Christians resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim’s perspective.” This underscores the reality that certain unjust actions that might be ignored are still acts of violence. In order to thoroughly understand violence, it is important to dig deep into both individual personal experiences and also through broaden the forms even when victims are ignorant of it.

The Bible and Violence

Middleton (2009:783) notes that the Bible conveys violence as “to pursue, to oppress, or to afflict.” Thus, violence cannot occur unless the perpetrator actually acts out his violent inclinations. This action must be perceived as unjust and reveals itself in diverse ways. If this happens, violence occurs within a broader spectrum, and ranges from unjust actions that are intensely hostile to those that are mildly hostile. Intensely hostile actions can be executed physically, psychologically, and or socially. These could encompass actions such as beating, discrimination, torture, and even death. Such action usually strikes at an individual’s basic needs.

Human Violence in Scripture

The Bible explains that it is the wickedness of human hearts that have led mankind to envy, strife and jealousy. The result of these wicked tendencies resulted in the first human violence. One may wonder, how come what God called “very good” finds itself in disorder, crisis, war and destruction? Since the world became dominated with suspicion, greed, jealousy, envy, robbery, violence and war, human wickedness and the inclination of their heart became evil,

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the result became all sorts of social issues that has brought about the lack of peaceful living on earth. The reports various forms of violence which will be briefly explored.

Violence in Genesis

Very early in the Biblical narrative we read the story behind Cain's murder of his brother Abel. God favoured Abel's sacrifice but did not pay attention to Cain's offering (Genesis 4:3-5). Abel's offering was not inherently superior to Cain's. Throughout the Old Testament, God looks with just as much favour on grain and other produce offerings, as He does on animal offerings (Leviticus 1-6). Rather, God regarded Abel's offering because it was given in true faith (Hebrews 11:4). Cain, however, had made the common mistake of thinking that God can be influenced by means of our offerings (Genesis 4:6). He had forgotten that God repeatedly makes it clear that He will be gracious to whom He will be gracious, and He will show mercy upon whomever He will show mercy (Exodus 33:19). Thus, in the second generation of humanity, a brother spills the blood of his brother. Cain murdered Abel because he was jealous.

The pattern is set. If jealousy is left unchecked it will grow, deepen, and intensify, and result in violence. Those who give in to violence find sin crouching at the door, but "you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:6, 7). Cain did not heed God's warning. He gave into the domination of sin and exercised his angry desire by killing his brother (Genesis 4:8). The Bible states that jealousy leads to anger and that sin is predatory, crouching at the door, looking to possess Cain. Violence, in other words, is often the tipping point after resentment turns to rage. Cain did not heed the warning, and blood was spilled. God responds to Cain, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" (Genesis 4:8). McEntire writes that "this first act of violence foreshadows the wickedness and evil of all humanity, and would cause God to blot it out with the flood (Genesis 6:5-7)" (McEntire 1979:1).

This biblical passage illustrates the fact that violence is the result of the pathology of the soul. Violence does not generate from military service, generational tribal hatred, or longstanding social inequities. Rather, violence is as close to us as our own hearts. Later in Genesis, a profound principle is laid down regarding the moral depravity of violence. "Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image" (Genesis 9:6). This is also early in the Biblical account. This is foundational in the sense that it links to the foundational reality that violence against human beings is wrong because human beings are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). There is worth and dignity in human life that should not be taken by another person.

Dignity of Human Life

There is a worth, a value, and a dignity to every human life. Man's unique status among all other creatures derives from his relationship to the Creator. It is not a physical replica of God (Isaiah 40:18; Luke 24:39; John 4:24) nor an emanation or a part of God; not independent of God. Man is given features that correspond and relate to the Creator. These include the capacity to share in His rulership and responsibility to exercise partnership in a communion with Him, reflecting how God wants him to be and act. Thus, Roehrs 1971:18, points out that "we bear His likeness and imprint"

When man subsequently broke this divinely stipulated relationship dragging all creation with him into frustrating disharmony (Romans 8:20-23), he lost the ability to live and act in harmony with God and his fellow human beings as he was intended to do (Genesis 3, 5:1-3; James 3:9). Capon (2011:20), notes that "Not everything that happened in the Old

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Testament times was condoned by God. Some of the violence in the Old Testament was a protection against hostile powers and the judgment of God.” Capon (2011:20), further notes that “The nation of Israel in the Old Testament was a theocracy; and it is obvious from reading the New Testament that from that point on, an entirely different set of ethics applies with the coming kingdom of God with Jesus.”

Dietrich (2005:3, 4, 5) observes that “the Hebrew Scriptures are not a primer on violence, but, in a surprising fullness and diversity, offer guidance for overcoming violence.” Dietrich believes that “This shows how Biblical passages guide the readers to hinder, limit, reject, and prevent violence, and to eliminate its causes, all the while offering the hope of an ultimate end to violence.” Brueggemann (1997:381) argues, “Yahweh is said to work violence that belongs to the enforcement of sovereignty.” Atkinson (1995:877), notes that “Violence, therefore, is not part of God’s creation. Violence is a result of the chaos, alienation and pride of the fallen humanity and it will not be part of the New Kingdom either.”

How the believer should respond to violence is a recurrent theme in the book of Psalms. Psalm 10 is a psalm of lament which concludes with the faithful assertion of God’s inevitable goodness and right action on behalf of the victims (Psalm 10:17, 18). This vision of ultimate justice is familiar to those who read the Psalms. Throughout the Psalms, the voice of Israel speaks reflecting the nation’s historical experience. They protest against injustice and violence and use strong language against Babylon (Psalm 137:8, 9). Alexander (2000:834), notes, “It is the cry of Israel in the despair of exile, committing to Yahweh its strongest desire for revenge and trusting Him to do what is right.” Alexander (2000:834) says, “Psalms such as this one speaks to the language of Israel’s heart - passionate for God’s glory, immersed in the pain, ambiguities and turmoil of history, and offering them all to God.” By turning to God in distress and addressing Him, the petitioner shows his complete dependence on God. To look elsewhere for deliverance would be contrary to God’s will. God’s presence will inevitably reside with those who are most needy in order to strengthen them from within. God pays attention to the needs of the disadvantaged and the terrorized. God will perform justice for the unfortunate, the abandoned, and all victims. A greater testimony is that which Isaiah and other minor prophets perceived with regards to the coming end of violence.

Anticipated Peaceful Kingdom

The prophetic testimonies of peace in the Bible appear to be relevant for all who have suffered violence. Isaiah presents a vivid prophetic picture of anticipated peace in which nations “will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. No nation will raise a sword against another or train for war anymore” (Isaiah 4:2). This theme of transforming swords into ploughshares is also seen in Micah (4:3 and Joel 3:9-10). Swords and ploughshares were two valuable uses of metal. Each could be transformed into the other, allowing people to tend the ground or kill their neighbour.

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to a future Saviour who would crush violence and become the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Waltke (2007:402) comments, that “Isaiah outlines this new model of holy war that is a spiritual, not political, kingdom.” This was not a political, but a spiritual kingdom prophesied in Hosea 1:7, Zechariah 4:6b; and in Micah 7:18-20. The separation between political and spiritual powers comes to its full fruition in the New Testament. The Messiah does not wield a carnal sword that cuts flesh, but a sword that cuts hearts. Hebrews 4:12 strengthens this position. The Bible is not simply a

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collection of words from God. It is not a mere vehicle for communicating ideas. It is living and life changing and dynamic as it works in human beings to turn them from violence to life. God turns political and military power over to the state, while turning the spiritual power over to Jesus Christ who conquers the real enemy behind the world powers.

In the New Testament, the focus shifts to Jesus' teaching on revenge and his teaching on loving your neighbour. Stott (1994:39) notes that "The authority of Jesus is equal to the law, but does not replace it. The Law is now seen to encourage love for enemies (5:38-48) and a breaking down of the barrier between Jews and Gentiles" (15:1-28). Thompson (2003:192) argues that "This act allows the inferior in the relationship to assert her or his equal humanity with the oppressor, and it forces the oppressor to take stock of the relationship and perhaps of the social system that supports such inequality." Keener (1993:199), explains that "If Jesus' disciples will err, let it be on the side of not retaliating, of yielding, of giving, or of being taken advantage of. A backhanded slap to the face is not assault (Matthew 5:19)." Keener (1993:199) is of the view that "Jews in the first century could readily be forced by occupying Roman soldiers to relinquish possessions or even for a time their freedom."

Jesus' disciples can learn to exhibit this strong softness, gaining more by giving up what might be theirs by reasonable expectation and by right. Jesus explaining the true meaning of revenge in the law now addresses love for one's neighbour.

Responses to Violence

Love as a Response

Jesus taught that love is essential in responding to religious violence. The desire to limit one's loving deeds to a particular group manifests itself wherever sinners are. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:43-48 rejects this universal tendency, just as He did in Matthew 5:38-48. Scaer (2000:137), explains pointedly, that "The commands to love the enemy and pray for the persecutors are given with the express intent that they must and can be fulfilled in the community of Jesus (5:11)." According to Scaer (2000:138), "These are not optional. If these commands are not carried out, this community is no longer recognized as belonging to Jesus."

Jesus commands His disciples to love without reference to the worthiness of the person being loved and to pray for others in the same way. Even the enemy and the persecutor must receive the loving deeds and prayers of Jesus' disciples. This understanding shows love in Biblical parlance does not refer to an emotion, but rather to an attitude of good intention that issues forth in appropriate action for the good of the other. It has nothing necessarily to do with liking someone or with emotions. His disciples' purpose in loving and praying in this way is to give the evidence that they are the sons of the heavenly Father, who is known only in Jesus (Matthew 11:27). The Father is good to both evil and good, to just and unjust. This is evident in the realm of creation, where God does not withhold His good gifts from those who have set themselves against Him in unbelief and rebellion (Romans 3:23, 6:23). It is pre-eminently so in Jesus Himself, who gave His life as the ransom for all (Matthew 20:28).

In this literary and canonical context, Jesus' primary aim is not to condemn His disciples as the sinners that they surely are, but rather to reveal to His disciples the will of God for their calling as the salt of the earth and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Their relationship with Jesus and with His Father is created by repentance (Matthew 4:17) and faith

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in the promised blessings that Jesus pronounced in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). In that relationship and strengthened by that blessing, Jesus' disciples will individually, and corporately, begin to manifest the will of God for their lives. They know all the while that their quest for perfection has nothing to do with causing or maintaining their standing in the presence of God. Jesus the Lord is the one who manifests absolute perfection on behalf of His disciples, and His completed work for them is at all times the certain hope and confidence of His disciples (Matthew 5:19).

The Usefulness of the Sword

Jesus' final words to the disciples in Luke 22:35-38 presents a reverse of the instructions He gave in Luke 9:1-6 and 10:1-12 when He sent the Twelve and the seventy-two respectively to preach the kingdom of God and to heal. Just (1997:851) notes, "Then He sent them without provisions so they would have to depend on God to sustain them through the gifts offered by their host families, much as a pastor is supported by his congregation (cf. 10:6)."

Did Jesus change His mind? Is He instituting a new pattern for mission? Why would Jesus instruct His disciples not to provide for themselves and even arm themselves for violent conflict by selling their garments and buying swords? In Acts, the disciples held everything in common, renouncing their individual possessions (Acts 2-4). They willingly endured persecution and offered no armed resistance (Acts 5, 7, 8,12,16,17, and 19). Hengel (1973:88) believes that "Jesus' teaching of nonviolence demanded of His followers that they renounce violence and love their enemies." Hengel (1973:23) however, says "it may be inferred that Jesus had taken no exception to them bearing the ordinary means of self-defence when traveling in bandit-infested country beyond the protection of armed authority." Keener (1999:642) comments: "Protecting Jesus was a paramount issue, yet Jesus did not want His disciples to protect him," Keener believes.

For Matthew, Jesus came to conquer by way of suffering on the cross, not by way of wielding the sword. Yet, it is easier in human terms, for disciples to fight for their cause than simply to embrace martyrdom for it without resistance; once they realized that martyrdom without resistance was the price for following Jesus, the disciples fled. Jesus had already plainly affirmed that in the process of fulfilling His mission, He would die a violent death. It was not appropriate for the disciples to attempt to prevent this. Keener (1993:122) further comments, "They came prepared for armed resistance from one they supposed was a messianic revolutionary. These are not the words of a violent revolutionary (Matthew 26:47).

Keener (1993:122) believes that the "end-time schemes often included a great battle between the people of the light and the people of darkness, and Jesus certainly expected violence (24:1-2), but His own followers were to stay clear of it." Just (1997:851) agrees that "the period of physical safety is drawing to a close. When Jesus is arrested, the lives of the disciples will be in jeopardy too". The disciples must plan carefully and take precautions if they are to complete their work as God intends. They will face spiritual enemies and physical need, assault, and martyrdom. They must equip themselves in all respects for the battle ahead. Just (1997:852) exclaims that, "yet even though the kingdom of God does not come by the sword, physical provisions for the labour of ministry and the bodily necessities of those who serve will be required". The disciples have exhibited a pattern of misunderstanding throughout their sojourn with him. They still do not comprehend that in the kingdom the things of God are opposite from the things of people.

In this respect, they are sinners who think about their own needs and do not trust the Lord of the harvest to provide. They have been sent as messengers of peace, but like

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Jerusalem (Luke 19:42), they do not yet truly understand the things that make for peace, as shown by the two swords they have in their possession at Passover. They are among the transgressors whom Jesus came to save. Just (1997:853) affirms:

The two swords suggest the apostles were afraid and so brought swords to defend themselves by violence. Hence, the apostles are among the transgressors. But this citation primarily sets the stage for the passion that is to follow. From this moment on, Jesus will be reckoned with transgressors.

Just concludes that, “these precise words conform to Luke’s view of Jesus as the suffering, righteous prophet who comes to identify with sinful humanity, place Himself in solidarity with sinners, and die on behalf of all, crucified between two malefactors” (Just 1997:853). From these words explaining it is believed that the passage indicates the hospitality the disciples received then, would not necessarily await them in future. But now, is emphatically a signal of their new situation after the resurrection (Luke 22:36). Let the one who has no sword sell his garment and buy one. This is an indication that to give up a necessary garment for a sword indicates hostility and persecution are at hand (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2, 12: 1-5). Jesus warns His disciples about the hostile times they will face, similar to His rejection. No disciple including us will avoid some of the hostility that Jesus faced. Yet, He bore the sins of man, and makes intercession for the transgression (Isaiah 53:12).

At His trial, Jesus answered: “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world” (John 18:36). Jesus’ clear statement shows that God’s kingdom is not defended by force of counter-violence. Rather, He is pointing out specifically that His was a spiritual kingdom. This spiritual kingdom has enough resources of its own to be victorious if it were to be engaged in actual physical violence with the kingdom of the world (Matthew 26:53). Jesus was rejecting any worldly political aspirations or rebellious intent. His kingdom did not threaten the external rule of the Roman Empire (Luke 20:25). If Jesus had been establishing a political kingdom, He would have encouraged His disciples to fight to establish it (18:10-11).

One of the most revolutionary teachings of Jesus is that human violence starts in a deeper place. The mind of violence has already begun before blood is spilled or words wound. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I tell you anyone who is angry with his brother must answer in court” (Matthew 5:21-23). We cannot talk about murder without talking about rage. We cannot talk about burning of churches, bombings, and taking of lives in Northern Nigeria without talking about the infections of hatred, malice, and anger in a violent culture. Again, there is this important teaching from Mark 7:14, “Then He called the people again and said to them, ‘listen to this: nothing that comes from the outside into a person can make him unclean, but what comes out of a person makes him unclean.’”

Here is the crux of the matter and it is the ugly news of the human condition that violence, like all sins, comes out of the human heart. Violence appears not to be caused by what people see or in movies. External stimuli certainly affect people. Deep psychological wounding also conditions people. A culture of violence tends to give permission to be violent, and or to be desensitized, but the instinct and choice to act out in violence comes out of the heart. We are not saying that this statement of Jesus offers a complete psychology for

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violence. Nevertheless, there is a kernel of truth here as we look at the mystery of violence in our society, especially in context of Christians in Northern Nigeria. This focus on the internal sinful motivation for violence is in complete contrast to the approach adopted by both Pharisees and Muslims—who believe that violence and sin is something external hence all of the rules and regulations to try and prevent it.

Faithfulness in the Face of Violence

In the context of the religious violence in Northern Nigeria, what is this bravery of which Jesus speaks? How can Christians and others, living everyday lives and working in a violent place like Northern Nigeria prevail? How can they take Jesus' teaching to heart so that they do not live their lives cowering? Gaining insights from human history might help answer these questions. Matthew 10:25, leads to Jesus encouraging us to live bravely in the face of violence. Jesus clearly taught that the world is a sinful and violent place, yet He challenged His followers not to live in fear and trepidation. They are encouraged not to be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. He also encourages His followers that in the world, they will have trouble, but they are to be brave because He has conquered the world (John 16:33).

Sider (2002:326) believes that “God has not suspended the Biblical commands to work for the good of all (Galatians 6:10) and love your enemies (Matthew 5:44). It is crucial that the church offer a Biblical answer to the question. Clapsis (2007:3) wonders, “What should be the relationship of the Christian faith to the violence existing in the world and how should Christians respond to violence in a matter that is rooted in faith and their relationship to God?”

Jesus's liberating message of love without restriction includes also renunciation of violence that destroys one's fellow man physically or mentally. Jessica Stern (2003:296) wrote, “We engage religious terrorism on the ideological level by hold[ing] fast to the best of our principles, by emphasizing tolerance, empathy, and courage.” Insight from these scholars show that violence has irreparable consequences for the individual and for society. They provide perspectives on religious violence and some of these scholars have offered suggestions concerning how to respond to the question of religious violence as it impacts Christianity

Promoting Peace Building

Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath (Joshua 9:15-16). In context of Nigeria, religious actors and leaders have been involved in local peace building efforts, policy makers, diplomats and scholars approach religion not only as a source of conflict, but as an important resource in resolving conflict and violence. However, more work is needed on religions beyond Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. Lederach (2005:5) asked a simple, but clear question that “How do we transcend the cycles of violence that bewitch our human community while still living in them?” Lederach (2005:5) says that we “generate, mobilize, and build moral imagination which requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies.”

Peace building is a means of involvement in [the] human predicament of war-like conditions. Coping with such conditions corresponds to God's own response and action. It implies assuming responsibility against all the odds, risking peace-making out of the situation of powerlessness, and demonstrating the conviction that in the end God's kingdom will

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prevail. The challenge is not palatable. However, it is Jesus' clear call for His followers at all times. Somehow, the message and work of peace builders need to have begun long before the bullets are loaded for violence.

Jesus forbade His disciples to indulge in personal retaliation of any sort. Stumme (1998:1), rightly observes that our Christian witness, "takes on a critical edge when we trust our moral activity to achieve what comes only as God's gift of faith." This biblical and theological imperative may remind us Christians in Northern Nigeria that our relationship with God is not something we can earn through our own energy, but it is God's gift to which we respond in faith. The heart of Christians' response to violence is to clarify, reinforce, restore, and promote an understanding of God's gracious gift through bearing witness to Jesus Christ and remaining firm in the theology of carrying the cross of suffering and constantly following Him. Briscoe (1982:228) admonishes Christians that "the reality of conflict in human relations is that evil will continue to persist and Christians will not be exempt from its painful encroachment."

The New Testament idea shows that with the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, God's clear will for Christians in a violent world is for them to stand firm in their faith. Atkinson (1995:878) points out that the New Testament response of peace-making, patient suffering, non-retaliation - even for an unjust cause, and overcoming evil with good, dominates the text Wink (2001:11) reiterates, "For Christians, nonviolence is rooted in our understanding of a God who is peace, who gives peace, who calls us to make peace and justice, and to live out Jesus's teachings and bear witness to the promise of God."

Lesson from the Early Church Response

When Jesus was born, his birth triggered religious and political strife. Herod was afraid and his response was to attempt to have the newly born King of the Jews executed (Matthew 2:3-18). The early growth of the Christian church was likewise confronted with a systematic attempt to suppress or exterminate Christianity with differing methods ranging from social pressure up to and including systematic violence being used. Violence against Christians began with the action of the Sanhedrin against Peter and John in reprisal for their proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:1-3, 5). Violence took place when Stephen was stoned to death, following which the Christians of Jerusalem were driven out of the city and scattered in every direction (Acts 8:1-4). Harrison (1960:403) writes that, "Diocletian attempted not only to exterminate the Christians, but also to destroy their literature. He confiscated and burned all copies of the Scriptures that he found and demolished the church buildings."

Violence thus characterized the beginning of the church. The pagans misunderstood the Christians. They considered Christians to be atheists, anti-social, and politically subversive. Violence was the protest of heathenism against the gospel in its spiritual and social manifestation. So how did Christians respond to the violence used against them down through the centuries? The Christian church was often subjected to violence. Hecht (2012:17) notes, "Frequently, early Christians who refused to renounce their faith in Christ literally were fed to the lions. They had no armies and conquered no lands by force in the name of Christianity for centuries after Christ established His church." Chernus (2004:96) maintains that, "even if they should lose their lives, they know that they do so in a winning cause." Thus, Christianity prepared adherents to accept war and other adversity as a necessary part of the intensification of evil that must take place during the end times, just as Jesus had provided the model by accepting His death on the cross.

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Conclusion

The discussion of violence by scholars reveals that there are those who favour a violent response to violence. Others favour the tradition and theology of nonviolence as a Christian resource in the struggle against and in response to violence. The early Christian church was pacifist at the beginning. When Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christians saw it as their duty not only to protect her existence, but also to protect others. Hence, contemporary views of response to persecution and suffering today do not differ significantly from the early church.

Everyone needs to know that the Creator is the author of life. Any person or thing that God creates should not be thoughtlessly destroyed. There is always need to seek, to save, preserve, and restore life instead of destroying it. The physical force meted on Christianity over time has great implications for the church. The Church in Africa needs to develop an understanding on the nature and theology of the cross to help Christians to know how to contain it by having a right approach when responding to inter-religious crisis. This is not just an important missiological or theological response, but more importantly, it gives Christians the right intellectual and practical tools with which to face challenges posed to Christian faith.

Recommendations

Theologians, Christians, pastors, missionaries, and leaders who are in the Lord's vineyard in Northern Nigeria and in Africa need to understand the reason for their existence in the world, their humanity, and the fact that their behaviours as they endure sufferings and cope with the realities and fragility of life will significantly affect their context. Their response will inculcate biblical awareness not only in members of churches, but outside the church, enabling Christians to serve God and live as witnesses to the world. This will help in communicating and preaching the Gospel message in such a way that speaks to contemporary social and spiritual needs answering the questions of life people are asking.

God requires total love and commitment from His children of light toward their neighbours who are still in the dark. When they reach the understanding that violent living is counterproductive and self-defeating to existence, it will help them approach better and respond appropriately to religious violence within the context of Jesus' love. It will further help them to understand that resorting to a violent life does not solve any conflict, but rather it suppresses human existence, and prevents peace and church growth. If Christians who are living in flash points of violence are serious in putting into practice the teaching of Jesus to love their neighbours and if they are committed to God, they will shine for Christ without distraction (Philippians 2:16). Then they will experience forgiveness and reconciliation leading to healing and praying constantly for their enemies to have respect for human life and dignity.

There is dear need to exhort Christians in Northern Nigeria; in Africa to recognize Jesus as Lord and trust Him and always be prepared to give an answer for the reason of their hope with gentleness as part of their suffering for Christ in their context of living in a violent environment (1 Peter 3:15). The Christian pilgrimage is not about the race of saints along the way to heaven, or of the dangers and encouragement of the pilgrim, but rather a discussion of the qualifications needed to enter the gate at the end of the journey. Agang (2016:53) sums this up really well, "pacifism is against all forms of violence. It draws attention to the fact that violence is not only an enemy without, but also within persons." Agang (2016:53) affirms "we may not have to go into a physical war, yet we must fight the spiritual battle."

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