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The Response of Christians to Islamic Violence in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Religious violence in Nigeria is worrisome, and years of repeated assaults on churches and individuals in the northern parts of the country seem to have forced Christians to conclude that the only option is to respond with violence, not merely in self-defence but in reprisal, even pre-emptive assaults on Muslims. The obvious consequence of this is that the Christian faith is losing its uniqueness as a religion that truly preaches and practices peace. The gospel is at risk of losing its power, which lies in love – even for enemies. Yet, the response of many Christians is almost understandable in the face of relentless assaults on their freedoms and lives, with little or fruitless government interventions. Is there an option that might at least offer hope for Christians of dealing with the problem of Islamic violence without losing the power of the gospel? This paper proposes the philosophy of nonviolence as a positive response that has biblical backing, and that has been used elsewhere with a good measure of success. In doing this, the paper adopted a historical-critical method for the research.

1. Introduction

The research examines the response of Christians to Islamic violence in Northern Nigeria, using Jos as a case study. Various incidences of Islamic violence in Northern Nigeria targeted at Christians – their lives, churches, homes and businesses – are discussed. It also identifies the

various strategies adopted by Christians as a response to the Islamic violence in Northern Nigeria, which has mostly been retaliation. In addition, the research proposes the philosophy of nonviolence as a positive response, citing examples from the Bible and other nonviolent approaches that have proved to be efficient and successful in real life situations. The nonviolence proposal is to caution the fact that violent responses by Christians to Islamic violence may lead to the abandonment of peace, which is a core Christian characteristic that has since began to erode. Christians may no longer be considered true followers of Jesus Christ, who has given love and forgiveness as conditions for being his followers and entering heaven. More so, violent response may aggravate religious violence and halt the preaching of the gospel, especially to the Muslims.

The research adopted mainly secondary sources of data, using books, journal articles and internet sources to gather information relevant to the study in order to understand the nature and the impact of Islamic violence on Christians in Northern Nigeria and how Christians have responded to this. The data collected were analysed using a historical-critical method. The article is divided into headings and subheadings as follows: 1. Introduction; 2. Cases of Islamic violence in Northern Nigeria; 3. The responses of Christians to Islamic violence; 4. Alternative responses, which is further divided into sub sections thus, 4.1 The Ghandi/Luther model, 4.2 Jesus teachings on love and forgiveness and 4.3 Paul's recourse to civil rights, 5. the challenges of alternatives to violence, and 6. Conclusion and recommendations.

In all the religious violence in Northern Nigeria, Jos seems to have been the most hit; thus, in this paper Jos is used as reference point. In 2010 there was an eruption of religious violence in Jos that reportedly claimed about 500 lives. There was massive destruction of property, and about 40,000 people were displaced. Bodies of victims were stuffed into wells and septic tanks. Authorities were caught unawares, and it took the intervention of the military to bring the ferocious conflict under control (Ekhomu 2010:12). Before January 2010, there have been

several religious conflicts that have hitherto occurred in Jos, including those of 1994, 1997, 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2008 (*Saturday Punch* 2010:3). Over the years many other conflicts have erupted in Jos and other parts of Nigeria, especially in the north with thousands of lives and property destroyed. Most of the violence was initiated by religious fundamentalists and fanatics coming from Islamic groups and most of the victims have tended to be Christians. Some of these groups as pointed out by Sylvester (2010:15) include the notorious *Hisbah*, *Boko Haram*, the *Salartist* Group of Preaching and Combat, *Al Sunna Wal Jamma*, and the Zanfara State Vigilance service, which have set up camps and operate in various States. Words of protest by Christian leaders have generally failed to produce any abetting of the attacks. Perhaps as a consequence of the persistent attacks, Christians have also responded violently with increasing frequency, and have sometimes been the actual perpetrators of violence against Muslims, often with claims that such actions were to pre-empt suspected plans of attack by Muslims.

Various explanations have been given for the existence and persistence of religious violence in Northern Nigeria. For example, Gofwen (2004: 46–47) sees conflict in general as “the inevitable paradox of corollary of human existence and civilization.” Throughout humankind’s history, a major source of such conflict seems to be religious intolerance in all societies. For Nigeria, Gofwen (2004:50, 58, 130–131, 39) alleges that the violent imposition of colonial rule, the creation of separate settlements called *Sabon Gari* for Christians in Muslim cities, created a culture of “we versus them” and the intra-elite struggle for power between southern and northern factions of the Nigerian power elite in the postcolonial era as the causes of religious conflict in Nigeria’s constitution into consideration.

2. Cases of Islamic violence in Northern Nigeria

Christians have not been slacking in cataloguing cases of Islamic violence in Northern Nigeria. For instance, Kuka (1992:234–235), a Catholic priest, observes that “the growth of Christianity in the areas of

the northern states that have been predominantly Muslim is a source of worry for many Islamic fundamentalists.” This is why churches are targets of Muslim rioters, and why the fundamentalists try to frustrate the building of Christian churches in Muslim-dominated cities. Kuka (1992:234) again points out the Muslim’s arguments that Euro-Christian values have informed policy formulation in the nation’s legal affairs; thus, they confuse the West with Christianity.

Ascribing Islamic violence to Islamic world ambition and strategy, Abikoye (1983:23) records that on 30th October 1982 a group of Muslim jihadists took to the streets bringing down two Christian churches, and damaging six others in the *Sabon Gari* area of Kano municipality, saying similar incidents have also been happening in Kaduna. Another case is cited by Oluniyi (2006:125–126) who quotes a website belonging to Bob Jones University News Service that a group of Muslim leaders known as the Council of Ulama warned a German Evangelist known as Reinhard Bonke to be prepared to die if he came to Northern Nigeria; and that while Bonke’s crusades have attracted millions of Nigerians in the south, Bonke’s attempt to hold a crusade in the Muslim-dominated north in 1991 ended with the deaths of Christians and destruction of many churches. Oluniyi goes on to point out that the 1991 riot in Kano lasted two days, leaving 200 people dead and hundreds injured.

The targets were mostly southerners and Christian northerners. A new dimension was introduced as the rioters moved from street to street, killing people, setting vehicles and houses on fire. As have never happened in the previous riots, the Christian community showed an unwillingness to turn the other cheek. They mounted barricades and formed vigilante groups to defend the non-indigenous enclave of *Sabon Garri*. The counterattack threatened to escalate the crisis. A mosque was burnt at Emir’s Road in apparent retaliation of the more than 20 churches burnt (Oluniyi 2006:132). *Today’s Challenge* (1987:6–21) also records Kaduna State Government report of a Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the Kafanchan communal disturbance of Friday, 6th September 1996: at about 8:30 am one Monday Yakunat was

alleged to have preached the Christian religion and in the course was said to have blasphemed the name of the Holy Prophet of Islam. That led to his abduction by the Shiite Muslim group.

The episode led to a crisis where two lives were lost, several people injured, and property alleged to be worth 3.6 million naira (Nigerian currency) were damaged. Kafanchan has since remained a hot spot for religious violence that has repeatedly occurred and lingered up to 2020. The violence was between indigenes, which are largely Christians and the non-indigenes, which are mostly Muslims, between farmers and herders, and between Fulani and Christians. Referring to yet another incident, Benson (2010:11) recalls many destructive Islamic attacks in Kaduna that rendered lots of residents homeless, fatherless, motherless and childless, while many lost their life savings and acquisitions. He then lamented how many human beings were slaughtered towards the end 2009 in the Boko Haram crisis in Borno State. Sylvester (2010:15) further points out the emergence of several Islamic fundamentalist groups in the northern parts of the country, especially in Zaria, Bauchi, Kano, Yobe, Katsina, Kebbi and Jigawa States. He lists the groups as including the notorious Hisbah, Boko Haram, the Salartist Group of Preaching and Combat, *Al Sunna Wal Jamma*, and the Zanfara State Vigilance service, which have set up camps and operate in this States.

Adetunji (2010:7) reports the allegations of some human rights activists that thousands of Nigerians had been killed in different religious conflicts within the country since her independence in 1960 through religious extremists. He further points out that Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with more than 150 million people who live on less than \$2 a day, has become a breeding ground for Islamist Fundamentalists. *The Punch* (2010:58) notes that the *Almajirai* (Islamic education pupils) have always been the major players in most religious riots, as also witnessed in the *Boko Haram* and *Kala Kato* violence in Maiduguri and Bauchi States.

When the Kano State government set up a Religious Disturbances Administrative Committee to investigate the religious rampage of 30th October 1982, the Kano State branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria complained that the Kano State government and people have subtly encouraged the attacks on Christians. The association pointed out the takeover of Christian schools without compensation to the churches owning the schools; the posting of Islamic religious teachers to those schools while refusing to post Christian religious teachers there; discrimination against Christian community in the use of public owned mass media while Islam is favoured; denial and revocation of certificates of occupancy for church buildings, as well as demolition of church buildings (Abikoye 1983:20). Abikoye (1983:20–24) also records destruction of churches in Kaduna State; building of mosques deliberately near churches to create tension, possibly leading to excuses to attack and demolish the churches; denial of places of worship to Christian students of Bayero University, Kano; the refusal of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria to establish a department of Christian religious studies. Further, the violent activities of the campuses are seen as assaults on Christian rights by Muslims in northern Nigeria.

All these are mere samples of the many atrocities, many going unrecorded, of Islamic violence against Christians in northern Nigeria, which sometimes results in responses and reactions of various kinds by Christians.

3. The responses of Christians to Islamic violence

The Christian response to Islamic violence in northern Nigeria has shifted from mere protests to violent reactions. According to McCain (2005:27–28), after some Muslims extremists in Zaria burned down 142 churches, some Christian leaders in the north met and decided that they were not going to be passive anymore. Since then, Christians have often responded to violence in Christian areas by attacking when they have been attacked. Kuka (1992:235) points out that in response to Islamic violence, “Christian militants have sought to assert their rights,

arguing that they have constitutional protection to settle, work and worship anywhere.”

Sometimes the response of Christians has been that of panic. This is usually aggravated by text messages alleging plans by Muslims to attack. Such text messages are difficult to verify but tend to circulate very quickly. Falola (2010:34) reports such a panic in Mina, Niger State when a text message sent to the hand phones of many residents claimed that members of a particular religion will be attacked by another group after the Friday (Muslim) prayers. The alleged plot was leaked by a “little girl” who overheard a conversation in which the threat was mentioned. In panic, many Christians have closed their businesses, ran to military barracks or relocated to southern Nigeria over the years.

Another response is more commonly verbal rhetoric. For instance, Olatunji (2010:69) argues that the political north, as long as it has existed, has promoted the exclusive political and economic interest of the North-West of Nigeria, while the Christians in the north have only been used as donkeys for carrying the political burden of the region. This, he says, explains why the so-called northern leaders protested against the appointment of service chiefs from southern Kaduna. They protested the appointment of General T. Y. Danjuma as the chairman of the presidential adversary committee. They resisted the emergence of a Christian governor in Kaduna State. They sponsored the ethno-religious crisis against Christian communities of the north, particularly in Zangon Kataf, Tafawa Balewa and recently in Plateau State. Olatunji asks if the description of the north for political reasons by northern politicians include the Bachama, Jukun, Baiju, Idoma, and other ethnic groups whose churches in Kano, Sokoto, Zangon, Katsina and Borno are regularly razed under the watchful eyes of government officials. Some of the rhetoric is less cohesive than Olatunji’s. It might include direct threats or violence against Muslims, or description of Muslims in very uncomplimentary terms. *Today’s Challenges* (1987:21) reaction to the problem of imposition of Islamic school uniforms on Christian pupils

is that the “school uniform is another ploy by Muslim fanatics to convert former missionary schools into centres for the propagation of Islam, and to Islamize the educational system.”

The reactions are often emotion laden descriptions of Islamic violence, such as Fabiyi’s (2010:8) description of the January 2010 violence in Jos as premeditated, wicked, deliberate and terrifying. He continues: “Our fellow brothers and sisters were just coming out of churches in Nassarawa of Jos when some Muslim youths pounced on them with cutlasses and other weapons. He then expresses the attitude of the Christians: “We call on our Muslim brothers and sisters to see this as last of such on the Christians in the State. Enough is enough.” Fagbenle (2010:17), a columnist, opines that the imposition of the Hausa people on the indigenous people of Jos by the British colonialists, which did not result in the conversion of the indigenous people to Islam, has “turned these later day conflicts into the savage and unmitigated bloodletting they have become.” Lasisi (2010:5) laments that

Jos used to be a home of peace, friendship, neighbourhood and fun; it is a city any young man wanted to live in. But now, if you are not a Muslim you cannot say you want to freely walk to a Muslim-dominated area; and if you are not a Christian, you can’t dare stroll into a Muslim-dominated area. It is the story of the killing of the town.

These reports and statements imply that Christian response has grown in violence, especially with the reports of large number of Muslims killed and displaced in the Jos violence which is symptomatic of the trends of the Christian response, especially where Christians exist in large numbers. Christians seem to be abandoning their identity of peace. Can such identity be reclaimed in the face of relentless violence by Muslims? Do Christians not have a right to defend their property and loved ones against attacks by lawless persons, even though such persons seem to have the backing of government agencies? Most worthy of careful thought however should be the following questions:

What happens to the gospel when Christians respond to violence with violence, no matter the justification for it? Will violent response actually bring an end to Islamic violence or merely give Islamic fundamentalists an excuse to continue with their violence without a twinge of conscience? Does the failure of Western governments' efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan to stop Islamic violence to teach us the futility of violent response to Islamic extremism? Are there no alternatives to violent response by Christians?

4. Alternative responses

From the earliest days of the Christian church, peace has been the predominant attitude, but this shifted somewhat with time. According to Baiton (1960:14) the early church was pacifist up to the time of Constantine. Then, partly as a result of the close association of the church and the state under this emperor, and partly by reason of the threat of barbarian invasions, Christians took over from the classical world the doctrine of the just war, whose objective was to vindicate justice and restore peace. The just war had to be fought under the authority of the state and must observe a code of good faith and humanity. The Christian elements added by Augustine were that the motive must be love and that Monks and Priests were to be exempted. The crusades arose in the middle ages, a holy war fought under the auspices of the church or of some inspired religious leaders, not on behalf of justice conceived in terms of life and property, but on behalf of an ideal, the Christian faith. Just wars and crusades were however notorious for their atrocious ferocity and serious departure from the principles of the Christian faith. It was only in the modern era that other approaches emerged that offered alternative responses to violence.

4.1 The Gandhi/King model

Martin Luther King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, and died by assassination on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. He was an eloquent black Baptist minister who led the mass civil rights movement in the USA from the mid-1950s until when he was

assassinated. He rose to prominence through the organization or the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, promoting nonviolent tactics to achieve civil rights (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 6, 1987:870). King developed his philosophy of nonviolent resistance by studying the tactics of Mahatma Gandhi. According to King (2000:24), "Gandhi was probably the first person in life to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force to a large scale." King asserted that he found alternative and moral satisfaction in the nonviolent philosophy of Gandhi. Gandhi helped him to see that "the 'turn the other cheek' philosophy and the 'love your enemy' philosophy" were applicable to individual, racial and international conflicts (2000:24).

Referring to the lasting friendship between Gandhi and Lady Mountbatten, wife of Mountbatten who was once Viceroy of India, King (2000:125) believes that the aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, so that when the battle is over, a new relationship comes into being between the oppressed and the oppressor. King also quotes Gandhi: "If you are hit, don't hit back; even if they shoot at you, don't shoot back. If they curse you, don't curse back. Just keep moving. Some of us might be thrown in jail before we get there, but let's just keep moving" (2000:128–129).

King realized that the nonviolence philosophy would be hard to accept in the face of persistent violence by their opponents who seemed to show no signs of remorse. He did all he could to convince his people:

But there is something I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice; we must not be guilty of wrong deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into violence. Again, and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force (2000:225).

In a correspondence in response to the clergy representing eight major faiths in the USA, King states:

We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of local and national authority. Mindful of the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of self-purification. We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: "Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?"(2000:190).

Stassen (1992:20) makes a claim for nonviolence when he declares that "the practice of nonviolent action is spreading internationally, and it is turning over unjust regimes." He goes on to postulate that "Biblical peace involves relationship with God, society, and environment" (Stassen1992:213).Some of the responses of Christians to Islamic violence in Northern Nigeria have been quite biblical. For instance, following another mayhem in Are, Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State in July 2010, the then governor of the state, Jonah Jang declared 30 days of fasting and prayer (Nigerian Tribune 2010:3). The response of Christians to Islamic violence, however, needs to take a deeper recourse than has ever been done.

4.2 Jesus teachings on love and forgiveness

The basis for the Christian faith is love and where there is love there will be forgiveness. Jesus taught these principles as criteria for being a child of God or his follower. Not only did Jesus teach these, he practically lived it out for his followers to emulate. The book of Acts (1:1) talks about all that Jesus began both to do and to teach. Kadal (2013:18) agrees that "Jesus did not only teach pacifism, he lived it. Several times during his earthly ministry when confronted with death or threat of violence of some kind, he escaped from it." Jesus taught that blessed, or happy are those who make peace, for they shall be called the children of God; those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, the kingdom of heaven belongs to them; those whom men revile and accuse falsely, instead of retaliating they should rejoice for their reward shall be great

in heaven (Mt 5: 9–12). Responding to the question on what the greatest commandment is and what to do to inherit the kingdom of God, Jesus pointed out the love for God and loving your neighbour as one's self as the most important (Mk 12:28–31; Lk 10:25–27). Those who use violence against the church or Christians are not to be paid back with violence but are to be loved, blessed and prayed for (Mt 5:44–45, Rom 12:19–21, 1 Pet 3:8–22, 4:12–19).

Among other reasons, Agang (2017:38) suggests that “Jesus command is the first reason we need to refrain from responding to violence with violence.” True followers of Jesus will obey his command, the greatest of which is love, not only for self or brethren but also for enemies. Apostle Peter, referring to the teachings of Jesus on love and forgiveness pointed to them as what Jesus himself practiced and left for the Church to follow as examples (1 Pet 2:19–24). In what seems to be a new order from what the Jewish law says about retaliation in the Old Testament, Jesus speaking to his disciples in the New Testament recommended nonviolence response to violence and ill treatment when he says:

You have heard that it was said, ‘and eye for an eye and tooth for tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles (Mt 5: 38–42).

In the opinion of Kadala (2013:16),

... if the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:38–45 are a response to the Jewish *lex talionis*, then one ethic is being subverted by a new, superior morality. “An eye for an eye” is thus countermanded as inferior, even crude or barbaric, at least if viewed literally.

He however agrees that this teaching of Jesus was difficult to the disciples, it was difficult for the early church because of the persecution they underwent; it is equally difficult for Christians today, and it is more

difficult for Christians living in the northern part of Nigeria because of the ever-increasing religious and ethnic conflicts that have permeated their society. Kadala (2013:18) further quotes Graig S. Keener as asserting that although the *lex talionis* gives you the right to claim damages for the wrongs done to, this is also wrong. He maintains that it was permitted to the Jews because of the hardness of their hearts, but they took it to be a norm. This is in agreement with Marxsen (1993:104) when he says that what Jesus meant was that "The evil done by our enemies should never determine our actions or reaction."

Violence against Christians or against the church is an expression of ignorance, though it may seem as if the perpetrators know what they are doing. The Bible records that if the Devil knew he would not have crucified the son of God. Jesus considered the treatments meted to him up to the point of crucifixion as acts of ignorance. Throughout these, he did not protest neither did he retaliate, rather he prayed the father to forgive them for they did not know what they were doing. In the opinion of Kadala 2013: 21,

Jesus action may appear stupid before the wisdom of this world; however, its potential to creating peace and save the world is explained by Paul in his letter to the Philippians. There Paul urges the Philippians to adopt this attitude, urging them to "promote not only their own interests, but to consider also the interest of others" (Phil. 2:4). In Paul's vision, peace will be obtained if the Philippians would "become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe" (2:5).

The teachings of the New Testament have never been easy at any time, but practicable by the grace of God. So, Christians can adopt nonviolence as an alternative response to Islamic violence.

4.3 Paul's recourse to civil rights

The apostle Paul faced many situations that placed him in danger of suffering. In cases where he could not avoid suffering, he took it and

went on with his ministry (e.g. Acts 14:19–20). But whenever he could, he made use of his legal rights to escape suffering unnecessarily and kept on preaching the gospel. In Acts 16:35–39, Paul asserted his rights as a Roman citizen in questioning the way he has been illegally beaten and jailed. He thereby extracted an apology from the magistrates and has afterwards treated with proper respect. Just like in the nonviolence movement, Paul did not resort to violence, but used his civil rights to prevent further violence from being done to him. He was even able to peaceably visit other brethren and encourage them without further molestation.

In Acts 21:33–39, Paul was arrested by a Roman commander in Jerusalem following attack on him by a Jewish mob. Paul knew he could obtain permission from the soldier to express himself. He asked for permission and, receiving it from the commander, he preached to the mob that had attacked him. He did not try to preach in a riotous environment until he had obtained official permission. When the mob grew violent again, the commander decided to interrogate Paul by having him scourged, Paul then informed the commander that he was a Roman citizen. This immediately prevented him from suffering unnecessary torture and secured him safe passage later (Acts 22:25–29; 23:12–35). When he was allowed to confront the Sanhedrin, and the high priest ordered him to be struck, he boldly questioned the high priest's right to strike him illegally (Acts 23:1–7).

When Paul realized that there was a manoeuvre to hand him over to the Jews, which would probably end in his death, he appealed to his right to be tried by Caesar, thereby gaining passage to Rome, where he continued to preach the gospel in relative safety (Acts 25:1–12). Paul used every legal right available to him to ensure that he continued to preach the gospel wherever he could. He never took violent action against either the mob that attacked him, or the government officials who wanted to treat him shabbily. Some Christians in Nigeria have suggested such an approach, such as the suggestion of Oluniyi (2006:96–99) that Christians should respond to violence with "respect

for human rights and for the rule of law, appeal for reason and common language, and aversion of threat." All these alternative responses to violence however are very challenging and not easy to follow. Abikoye (1983:16–25) points out that "while the Bible enjoins us to repay evil with good and leave vengeance to God, it does not forbid us to assert our civil rights as enshrined in our nation's constitution." We need to seek creative ways of asserting our rights, while still repaying evil with good. Constructive engagement with Islamic violence must include condemnation of violence, but declaration of love for the violent.

5. The challenges of alternative responses to violence

Three major challenges that must be overcome in developing an effective response to Islamic violence in northern Nigeria include the attitude of the Muslims, the attitude of security agents, and the attitude of Christians themselves. An Egyptian convert to Islam presents a typical Muslim attitude to Christians that makes Christian response a great challenge:

Our hatred towards Christians took the form of harassment and assaults against them on the streets, but they answered our assaults with disgusting meekness. We responded by being more aggressive against them, and we started to plan how we could torture and intimidate them. We learnt that God had legalized killing them, plundering their possessions and looting their houses. According to the Qur'an, all their belongings were to be gifts from God to the Muslims (Copland 2003:81).

Oluniyi (2006:85) also cites the tendency of Muslim group to denounce delegates to national conferences on the grounds of marginalization of Muslims and to threaten *jihad*. Nonviolence is always premised on its appeal to reason; to a common standard of morality and logic. Muslim always believes Christian meekness is mere subterfuge to gain an advantage over Islam. Nonviolent response may even encourage more violence from Muslims. Moreover, many Muslims believe it is actually a religious duty to act violently towards Christians. To what then will

Christian nonviolent response appeal to bring an end to Islamic violence? It is worth noting, however, that Oluniyi commends an Islamic organization known as the Supreme League for *Sharia* Consciousness (SLSC) for denouncing another Islamic organization known as the Supreme Council for *Sharia* in Nigeria (SCSN) for the latter's violent view on *jihad*. Oluniyi (2006:85) says; "It is clear that the Supreme League for *Sharia* Consciousness is an agent of peace. While the Supreme Council for *Sharia* in Nigeria spoils for terror, the SLSC seeks to build bridges." Perhaps the existence of bridge builders among Muslims gives cause for hope that peace is possible through nonviolent means.

Another challenge is however posed by the involvement of the security agents who are considered to be the representatives of violent Islamic groups. Concerning the January 2010 religious violence in Jos, an Assistant Commissioner of Police, Usman Dagogo was suspended by Police authorities on suspicion of arming some displaced Muslim youths who were taking refuge at the Police Staff College, Jos (The Punch 2010:8). Fabiyi (2010:8) also reports allegations that Major General Saleh Maina, a General Officer commanding in Jos used his position to help in the killing of Christians. He was alleged to have organized all-Muslim Army patrol teams who were instructed to kill Christians. The Nigerian Army however faulted the allegations as unlikely. These incidents and allegations create an attitude of desperation and suspicion among Christians, making it difficult to develop any positive ideas about confronting Islamic violence in a creative manner. Questions may arise about the extent and consequences of the involvement of security agents in Islamic violence.

The attitude of Christians themselves is also a challenge to the development of a productive response to violence. Anyoku (2010:80) laments the absence of what he calls the church in the classical, pristine and original sense of them. He explains what he means as the existence of "only watery holes of famished, debauched souls, beehives of rump-shaking, woogie-boogie pleasure seekers, popular centres for

socializing, for deal-cutting, and amorous liaisons for trysting sweethearts.” The pleasure-loving attitude of Christians today certainly makes it difficult for them to develop the type of courageous attitude that is needed for creative response to Islamic violence. Many other Christians are not really concerned with the issue of the faith as such. They see nothing wrong with responding violently to Islamic violence because their major concern is self-defence. This is not a new attitude, as Baiton (1960:103) points out that the development of the idea of the just war could be traced to the Barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire:

The promotion of peace by the church in the period following the invasions was more difficult because the invaders had cut their way into the empire by the sword. They were bellicose, utterly devoid any feeling for the beatitude upon the meek. When these lusty warriors embraced the Cross, they regarded it not as a yoke to be placed upon their pugnacity, but as an ensign to lead them in battle. The Barbarians militarized Christianity.

There are many Christians today, and even Christian ministers, who care little about the beatitudes, as long as they can feel safe and have their needs daily met. They are quick to advocate violent response to Islamic violence. Christians must however realize, as Colson (2001:1–16) says to Americans in the faith,

The Christian life is a life of returning, of going back to the Cross daily in repentance and faith. We must face a sobering fact: we will not prevail against terrorism no matter how good our armed forces are. We will prevail only if God in His mercy decides to forgive us, heal our land, and give America another chance.

Violence has not succeeded, even when used by the armed forces of super-power countries, in quelling Islamic violence. Violence by Christian civilians is at best futile. Certainly, Nigerian Christians must return to God and his ways, while looking up to God to show us mercy and show us a way out of Islamic violence in northern Nigeria.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The path to peace with an opponent bent on violence is not an easy one, neither is a nonviolence response to violence an easy path to trade. It was not easy for the disciples of Jesus, that was why Peter took a sword and cut off some body's ear in defence of Jesus during an attempt to arrest him before Jesus corrected him (Mt 26: 50–54). It was not easy for the early church and it cannot be easy for our generation. When the instruments of government are used to discriminate against one religion, when the oppressor believes he has a divine mandate to discriminate and tacitly support acts of violence against others in the name of religion, when security agents are infiltrated by a group bent on visiting violence against other groups, the path to peace is not easy. However, responding to violence with violence is utterly futile to bring an end to violence, especially of a religious nature. The most effective counter force to religious violence is religious love; particularly Christian love. It is this love that some have employed in the nonviolence philosophy to bring about change. It is fraught with many uncertainties; it requires a lot of time to bear fruits; it will cost the lives of some of its advocates; but it is the best available means to ultimately prevail on the reasonable elements within violence-prone groups to bring about reasonable peace. Christians in northern Nigeria can develop a creative approach to Islamic violence which includes peaceful but loud and strong protest against violence and government discrimination; appeal to common humanity and scriptures in Islam that advocate peace; responding with love action towards Muslims, instead of violence; and perseverance and willingness to suffer while boldly proclaiming the virtues of peace.

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