OF BOMBS, GRENADES & THE CHURCH: VIOLENT ATTACKS OF ISLAMIC MILITIAS AND THE ETHICAL-THEOLOGICAL OPTIONS FOR EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

BY MATTHEW MICHAEL, PHD
Academic Dean, ETSK, Nigeria, & Research Fellow,
Departments of Old and New Testaments,
Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

"There is a special place in hell for those who remain neutral in times of moral crisis."

...Dante, Inferno.

ABSTRACT: In recent times, the ethical imagination of many African Christian communities in Kenya, Sudan, Nigeria and Central African Republic has dramatically undergone a violent radicalization which openly defends and gives support to violent ethical behaviours. In northern Nigeria in particular, the aftermath of the many violent attacks against the churches by the extremist Islamic sects, *Boko Haram*, have generally led to the questioning of the received pacifist tradition of the early missionaries, and the growing militancy of the evangelical Christian communities. Engaging the ethical mapping of this trend, the paper critiques the basic ethical-theological optionsof Christians in northern Nigeria to violence, and charts a new direction for the evangelical Christians of this region and beyond.

KEYWORDS: Christianity, Islamist Terrorism, Northern Nigeria, War

INTRODUCTION

Philip Jenkins has described the religious conflicts in northern Nigeria as a very important prelude to "third world war."[1] In his provocative analysis of the religious situation in northern Nigeria, Jenkins notes the triggering effects of conflicts in northern Nigeria for regional and global instability. In fact, he connects the consistent violent against the church in northern Nigeria to the volatile religious situations in South Sudan, Kenya, Jakarta, Malaysia and Philippine. Importantly, Jenkins advised policy makers in the western world to momentarily remove their eyes from the events in the Middle East and particularly focus their attention on northern Nigeria because the events that would finally trigger the third world wars are already building up and taking a

---

[1] Philip Jenkins, "The Third World War," *The American Conservative* (2010): 22-24.

disastrous turn. He describes the building of these violent events in northern Nigeria to a fearful Armageddon-like peak.[2]

While one could say that Jenkins' analysis exaggerates a mere local conflict by giving this conflict a regional and global status, it is evidently clear to careful observers that the religious conflicts in northern Nigeria is a direct expression of Islamic religious ideals which pertinently seek the complete Islamization of the western part of Africa.[3] This development has turned northern Nigeria into "a major African theatre of religious violence and aggression."[4] In his speech to the United Nations, Samuel D. Dali, the president of *Church of the Brethren in Nigeria*, has described this violence against Christians in North-Eastern Nigerian as a "genocide" aimed at wiping out the population of Christians in this region.[5] While it is wrong to encourage or stimulate Islamophobia, it is also morally irresponsible not to highlight for the rest of the world the constant threats, attacks and violence unleashed by armed Islamist militias against the churches in northern Nigeria within the purview of these regional and global antecedents.[6] The following paper develops a theological response of the

[2] The combined force of these violent realities in northern Nigeria gives particular credence to the truism of MiroslavVolf, when he said, "Religion is alive and well in today's world, and so is violence." See MiroslavVolf, *Exclusion & Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 284.

[3] The violent and non-violent character of Islam draws largely from entrenched social beliefs. Underscoring this perspective, A. Greeley, describing these general tendencies in religions, said, "In some circumstances religious stories and religious groupings validate and confirm the dominant social perspective. In other circumstances, religious stories and religious groupings are at odds with the dominant perspective, and they can even attempt to destroy it. One reason for this dual tendency of religion is that the theologies of most long-established religions are so diverse and complex that they can be interpreted to justify both quietism and violence." See A.M. Greely, *Religion: A Secular Theory* (New York: Free Press, 1982), 134.

[4] Sanusi Aliyu, "Religious-Based Violence and National Security in Nigeria: Case Studies of Kaduna State And The Taliban Activities In Borno State," Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, *Master Thesis*, 2009, 9.

[5] Samuel Dali, "The Genocide on Christians in North East Nigeria: The Time to Act is Now," *Paper Presented at the United Nations Security Council* (2014), 1-17.

[6] There are other forms of violence in Nigeria at the moment. For a description of these other kinds of violence see for example, Awunghe Achu Ayuk *et al*, "Curbing Multi-Dimensional Violence in Nigeria Society: Causes, Solutions and Methods of Solving this Trend," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 3, no. 5 (2012): 616-623; Diddy Antai, "Controlling Behavior, Power Relations within Intimate Relationships and Intimate Partner Physical and Sexual Violence Against Women in Nigeria," *BMC Public Health* 11, 511 (2011):1-11; Mary O. Balogun *et al*,

church to these attacks through methodological analysis, evaluation of the
dominant Christian responses to violence, and developing a fitting theological
proposal to the hostile mission and pastoral environments the church finds
herself in northern Nigeria.[7]

METHODOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

In engaging this present discourse, there is need to underscore the
methodological commitment of this paper to the pursuit of peace in spite of the
hostility unleashed against the church in incidences of bombing and massacre
of Christians at their places of worship virtually every week and the traumatic
conditions that most Christians go through at this moment in northern
Nigeria. The following basic methodological presuppositions of the paper are
hereby described.[8] First, "God's peace is the original *ontological* truth of
creation."[9] This suggests that peace is the underlying principle or state that best
describes the original creation. In this sense, rather than chaos, disharmony or
war, peace is a defining reality in the original creation, thus placing a high
premium on peace. Second, "God's peace is the goal of *history.*"[10] In this
presupposition, "we must deny the supposed cultural value of war" or the
attending economic, political or ethnic values attached to violence because in
spite of the wars in history and the violent behaviours of the human race, war is
an aberration and the aims of history lies in attaining and receiving God's peace
in all its fullness.[11] This rejects the commercial benefits of violence especially as
witnessed in the violent character of entertaining modern films or even the

---

"Intimate Partner Violence in Southwestern Nigeria: Are There Rural-Urban
Differences?" *Women &Health* 57, no. 7 (2012): 627-645; Amos E. Arijesuyo *et al,*
"Theoretical Perspectives on Campus Cultism and Violence in Nigeria Universities: A
Review and Conceptual Approach," *International Journal of Psychological Studies* 3, no.
1 (2011): 106-112; Zubairu Iliyasu *et al,* "Prevalence and Risk Factors for Domestic
Violence among Pregnant Women in Northern Nigeria," *Journal of Interpersonal
Violence* 28, no. 4 (2012): 868-883.

[7] For the colonial roots to the present violence in northern Nigeria see Yusuf Turaki,
*The British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria: A Social Ethical Analysis of the Colonial
and Post-colonial Society and Politics in Nigeria* (Jos, Nigeria: Challenge Press, 1993),
41-42; Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*
(Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993).

[8] The first three of these methodological presuppositions are adapted from the writing
of Oliver O'Donovan, the other presuppositions are additions from my personal
reflections. See Oliver O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University press, 2004), 2.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

profiteering armed deals by US, China and Russia.[12] Third, "God's peace is a *practical demand* laid upon us." This presupposition underscores that purposeful requirement is placed on the church by God to seek and pursuit ways of peace with all persons whether of moderate Islamic conviction or even terrorist. Fourth, eternal peace on individual and cosmic levels is ultimately unattainable without the due recognition and submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, thus rendering every peaceful pursuit between Christians and Muslims as primarily temporal in character. In this sense too, no human effort or contribution can bring about the needed peace without the recognition of the ultimate role of God in initiating, inaugurating and consummating the peace process. In this dimension, the divine activity in Jesus Christ is also purposefully designed by God to move the present world of chaos to a state of everlasting peace.[13] Lastly, despite the ultimate placement of world peace in God's hands, the church as a representative of this future state of peace has an enormous responsibility to promote, encourage and rigorously pursue programmes which celebrate and spread the foretaste of this peace to Muslims in northern Nigeria.

THEOLOGICAL-ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

There are several responses to violence in theological discourse.[14] The following are some dominant responses to violence in traditional theological discussions. To situate the present work in the ideological map of this mainstream discussion, we highlight the possible options available to the church in northern Nigeria as a valid position or response to the contemporary violence faced by the church. In particular, we note the merits and demerits of these traditional responses to violence and suggest an alternative position for the church in northern Nigeria.[15]

---

[12] See for example, Nick Browne et al, "American Film Violence: An Analytic Portrait," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 17, no. 4 (2002): 352-370.

[13] See Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2011).

[14] Violence itself has several causations in northern Nigeria. Underscoring this view, Agang rightly observed, "the combination of religion with other factors" had "led to the lethal nature of religion" in northern Nigeria. These other factors are political, ethnic, social and economical in dimension. On this multi-dimension to the causation of violent conflict in northern Nigeria see Sunday Bobai Agang, *The Impact of Ethnic, Political, and Religious Violence on Northern Nigeria, and a Theological Reflection on its Healing* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2011), 37-58.

[15] For popular views of Christians and Muslims on religion and ethnicity in Nigeria see Arnim Langer and Ukoha Ukiwo, "Ethnicity, Religion and the State in Ghana and Nigeria: Perceptions from the Street," *CRISE Working Paper* 34 (2007): 1-23.

THE PACIFIST POSITION

"History," according to Richard B. Hays, "bears haunting witness that" the
natural instinct for violence "is all too easily baptised and confirmed, so that
divine sanction is claimed for killing" of people.[16] Fighting against this natural
impulse for violence, the pacifist position to the problem of violence is pretty
simple. The position advocates the folding of one's hand and to trust God for
protection against the aggressor. For the pacifist, one should not defend his or
her life by any means, but should rather submit his or her life to the aggression
of an attacker. The pacifist prefers to surrender his or life to the attack of the
enemy rather than participating in fighting back, injuring, or defending
oneself against the attacker. In the context of this paper, according to pacifist,
one should merely give himself to suffering and martyrdom rather than
confronting an aggressor. In fact, the slogan of the pacifist is clearly "not to
resist an evil person" but to allow the evil person to injure or even take one's life.
This reasoning goes that in confronting the evil person one replicates violence
rather than quelling it. Even though some pacifist positions place conditions to
the extent, character and context of the said violence, the common position
among pacifists is never to confront evil by means of self-defence or retaliation.
In Nigeria, for example, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (Ekklesiyar
Yan'uwa a Nigeria, EYN) represents this pacifist tradition in Northern Nigeria.
The violent attacks on EYN churches have led to the call by its leader for
international intervention to confront these attacks and the impunity enjoyed
by the radical Muslim group, Boko Haram, in north-east Nigeria.[17]

Before describing its demerits, this position has four important merits. First,
this position seems to take seriously Jesus' non-violent attitude particularly in
his call not to resist an evil person and the ultimate sacrificial giving of his life in
the face of the unjust demands and persecution by the Jewish authority of the
first century. Drawing on this tradition, Hays says, "Armed defense is not the
way of Jesus. There is no foundation whatever in the Gospel...for the notion
that violence in defense of a third party is justifiable."[18] Charles Kimball also
notes, "Jesus rejected the mantle of a military savior that many zealots were
anticipating and some would-be followers urged on him. Jesus's teachings, in
fact, moved in another direction... Jesus challenged conventional wisdom,
telling his disciples to 'love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute
you'"[19] Second, the position also appears respectable and elegant in accordance

---

[16] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 318.
[17] Dali, "The Genocide on Christians in North East Nigeria," 1-17.
[18] *Ibid.*, 324.
[19] Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil* (Canada: Harpercollins, 2002), 169.

with the recent civil and non-violent philosophy of Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela.[20] The wide respectability of this position often makes its advocacy acceptable and it has become the accepted position among most international NGOs on conflict resolutions. Third, this position goes against the natural inclination of the human person to assert or retaliate thus it situates itself on the higher ethical plane which seems befitting for the higher ethical demands of Christianity. Hays also observed, "Jesus' disciples are to relinquish the tit-for-tat ethic of the *lextalionis* and live in a way that eschews retaliation and defense of self-interest."[21] Lastly, this position has rich historical precedent especially as seen in the life of the early church and the patristic fathers who exalted the value of martyrdom and sacrificial suffering in the manner of Jesus. According to Kimball, "The overwhelming evidence suggests that the followers of Jesus were pacifists for the first three centuries. Many early church leaders and documents underscore the unwavering commitment to nonviolence."[22]

In spite of its merits, this position also reveals certain problems. Seven of these problems are hereby discussed. First, this position encourages suicidal tendencies whether individually expressed or in its various community operations. In fact, it is a suicidal commitment to do nothing in the face of aggression. It encourages the taking of one's life and thereby suggesting a disregard for life. Even though the refusal of the pacifist to confront the evil person might be due to the high value the pacifist has for human life, in refusing to act in defence of this life, the pacifist permits the wilful and violent termination of life, thus encouraging the unjustifiable taking of life or even lives. In this regard, the pacifist acquiesces to the taking of one's life and gives room for the exploitation and destruction of lives. It is unclear how the pacifist lives with his/her conscience knowing fully well the suffering he or she permits as a result of passivity. Second, the pacifist's passive position can give room to conditions that lead to genocide and other horrible crimes against humanity because of its inability to stand up against attackers. One wonders what world have happened if the world remained pacifist towards Hitler and allowed him to carry through his nefarious plans against non-German races.[23] Third, this position appears irresponsible to oneself and others since the position does not

---

[20] On the treatment of these modern non-violent traditions See Agang, *The Impact of Ethnic, Political, and Religious Violence on Northern Nigeria*, 261-277.

[21] Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 326.

[22] Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 170.

[23] Hitler himself, in his critique of pacifism said, "the pacifist, by giving himself subjectively and entirely to his idea, will, in the presence of any menace to his people, be it ever so grave and unjust, always... seek after the objective right and never from pure instinct of self-preservation join the ranks of his herd and fight with them." See Adolf

commit itself to the protection and preservation of the lives of individuals and whole communities.[24] In addition, this position tends towards passivism and tacitly gives its sanction to injustice because of its inability to defend the innocent and to fight for the rights of persons wronged. Fifth, this position is unnatural because it goes against human natural instincts for self-preservation and survival. The unnatural character of the pacifist position makes it idealistic and unrealistic in practice. Sixth, this position contributes tacitly to the victory of evil over good. In this sense, pacifism gives room for the momentary victory of evil over good and thus undermines eschatologically speaking, the final victory of good over evil.[25] Lastly, from the perspective of theology, if God himself is not a pacifist since he himself judges, confronts and fights evil, what validates the pacifist position in the long run? Are we not promoting an ethical standard which lacks a theocentric commitment? Indeed, the pacifist position is largely non-theocentric because it encourages behaviours that are not in tune with God's quest to fight evil and injustice. From the foregoing, it seems the pacifist position undermines the quest of the church in northern Nigeria to confront evil and fight for justice in the face of massacre and slaughter of its members by Islamic terrorists.

THE "JUST WAR" POSITION

The just war theory argues that there are forms of violence that are justifiable.[26]

Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Reynal& Hitchcock, 1941), 58.

[24]Describing the alienation of most Christians with the non-violent Jesus, Volf observed, "We may believe in Jesus, but we do not believe in his ideas, at least not in his ideas about violence, truth, and justice." He added, "In a world whose order rests on violence we instinctively grasp for the *resurrected Messiah* who was given all power in heaven and on earth... Not that we find no use for the crucified one. We only insist on a clear division of labor between the crucified one and the resurrected one. The crucified Messiah is good for the inner world of our souls tormented by guilt and abandonment. He is the Savior who dies in our place to take away our sins and liberate our conscience; he is the fellow sufferer who holds our hands as we walk through the valley of tears. But for the outer world of our embodied selves, where interests clash with interests and power crosses sword with power, we feel we need a different kind of Messiah—'the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords,' who will make our wills unbending, our arms strong, our swords sharp." See Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 276.

[25]In a study, David J. Neville has tried to navigate between Jesus' non-violent teachings and his violent eschatology. On this study see Neville, "Toward a Teleology of Peace: Contesting Matthew's Violent Eschatology," *JSNT* 30, no. 2 (2007): 131-161. On the violent character of Jesus' parables and his non-violent disposition see Barbara E. Reid, "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 237-255.

[26]On the history of Just War theory and pacifism se Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your*

and appropriate. In fact, according to this view, not every war or violence is
Thus the Just War position suggests that selected use of violence could be just
intrinsically bad. The position encourages and provides justification for the
taking up of arms whether on the individual or community level. For example,
rereading the traditional pacifist reading of Jesus' non-violence in this mode,
Vincent Cheung observed,

> Jesus says, 'All who draw the sword will die by the sword' (Matthew
> 26:52).Some people have misconstrued these words to endorse pacifism or
> to forbid all uses of physical force. However, Romans 13:4 says that the civil
> servant 'does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent
> of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.' This indicates that some
> uses of physical force are legitimate.[27]

Just war has its merits as well as its demerits. Before engaging the demerits,
three merits of just war theory are noteworthy. First, this position is proactive
rather than being passive to violence. It takes initiative to wage war against the
aggressor rather than passively allowing human populations to be at the mercy
of the violent attacker. The position acknowledges the validity and place of
retaliatory violence or justifiable violence against an individual, state or region.
For the proponents of this view, wars are primarily divided into two types
namely, morally justifiable wars and immoral/unjustifiable wars. In this
division, violence could be carried out in harmony to the civilized code of
justifiable or unjustifiable considerations. Second, this position takes
responsibility to bring justice for persons under the assault or oppressive power
of an aggressor. Rather than folding their arms passively, this position takes full
responsibility to bring about peace and justice for the oppressed. For the just
war proponent, it is better for the aggressor to die than for innocent to die.
Third, this position allows and civilizes warfare by appealing to code of
behaviours which the enemy/opponent had breached. Lastly, this position
mitigates between passivity and offensive aggression by mediating these two
extremes.

   Beyond these merits, just war theory raises significant problems. Four of
these problems are particularly challenging. First, Just war theory has the
problem of subjectivity. Ideologically, every war in history appeared justified
from the point of view of the aggressor and unjustified from the point of view
of the victim. People go to war because they think that their cause for going to
war is justified. This shows that justification for going to war is invariably a

---

Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).
   [27]See Vincent Cheung, *Presuppositional Confrontations* (Boston: Reformation
Ministries, 2003), 17.

subjective exercise. To avoid this problem, list of conditions are often given as prerequisites for embarking on a just war, but these prerequisites are also problematic.[28] For example, one of the criteria for undertaking a just war is that it must be the last resort. It is difficult to define or determine what constitutes a last resort. For many wars in history, the aggressors have come to a conclusion that the only sensible thing to do at that moment is to go to war. For them, going to war at that point is the only alternative or the last resort. Consequently, the definition of a last resort as a criterion to embark on a just war is in itself problematic.

Second, just war theory has revealed a formidable problem in the declaration of war by a human authority. One wonders if any human institution or authority is fit to declare a particular war as just or unjust. What should an authority within a society have in order to wield the moral power to declare a war as just or unjust? Can any state deem itself morally fit to declare war against another state? In light of the moral deficiencies of most of the modern states, do they have moral power to declare a just war? Who decides the last resort? Another criterion for just war is that the damaging effect should be proportionate to the good hoped for and there should also be immunity for the non-combatant. However, the use of weapons of mass destruction – nuclear and biological –in modern warfare cannot adequately quantify or pre-determine in advance the effect, damage or the possible aftermath of such war upon the civilian population. While modern military ammunition and devices have helped to stop indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population, statistics from combat zones give proof of the unintended killing and maiming of non-combatant folks during military operations, thus further casting doubt on the precision of specified military targets during combat. In fact, understanding the destructive character of nuclear weapons, just war theorists often consider the use of nuclear weapon in modern warfare as unjust. Third, following from the immediate point, just war theory creates problems in its execution and conduct, especially in the human treatment of enemy combatants as well as civilians. While it is possible, theoretically speaking, to declare a war as just, it is another thing entirely to justly execute such war. In this sense, war should not

---

[28]Laying down the conditions for embarking on a Just War, Augustine observed, "The war must be just in its intent—which is to restore peace. . . . Those wars may be defined as just which avenge injuries. . . . The war must be just in its disposition, which is Christian love. . . . Love does not preclude a benevolent severity, nor that correction which compassion itself dictates. . . .[War] is to be waged only under the authority of the ruler. . . .The conduct of the war must be just. . . . Faith must be kept with the enemy. There should be no wanton violence, profanation of temples, looting, massacres, or conflagration. Vengeance, atrocities, and reprisals were excluded, though ambush was allowed." Unfortunately, this list of prohibitions is not always followed. See Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 171.

only be just, but it should be conducted in light of civilized codes of justice and fairness. In conducting a just war, there should be a plan in place to speedily bring about the desired peaceful regime. Similarly, the just war theory fails to properly appropriate the role of peace-making and dialogue in an antagonistic context; rather its verdict of war as a remedy to address violence increases violence rather than reducing it. It is ironic that it assumes that war could bring about peace when it is justly waged.[29] Lastly, Just War is problematic because of its subjective character, because, "When nations" or individuals "undertake acts of aggression they clothe them in 'just war' excuses."[30] From this subjective angle, history is replete with wars which are considered justified from the point of view of the aggressor and unjustified from the perception of its victims. O'Donovan rightly observed, "it is very often supposed that just-war theory undertakes to *validate or invalidate particular wars.* That would be an impossible undertaking. History knows of no just wars, as it knows of no just peoples."[31] This consideration renders invalid any quest to describe a particular use of violence or war as justified.

THE SELF-DEFENCE OPTION

In line with modern thinking, "a war is defensive if the other party fires the first shot."[32] However, in some cases, the measure of response against the aggressor might supersede the initial provocations or attacks, thus complicating or even blurring the line between offense and defence. In fact, for Self-defence to be effective, it must intricately adopt, express or execute the combative mechanics of an offensive attack. This relationship between defensive and offensive responses implies the fluidity in defining the borderlines where each response begins or ends. For example, verbal provocation might lead to staging an offensive attack, but should one consider the attack offensive or defensive since it is primarily based on an initial unarmed provocation by an opponent. When verbal or unarmed provocation is aimed at a person or community should this initial provocation be deemed offensive attack which demands a corresponding defensive action? Despite the difficulty in defining clearly these borderlines, in northern Nigeria at the moment, the self-defence option is the most popular and accepted response to violence among the clergy and members of the church. This option suggests that churches in northern Nigeria

[29] On the need to move beyond Pacifism and Just War see Walter Wink, "Beyond Just War and Pacifism: Jesus' Nonviolent Way," *Rev Exp* 89 (1992): 197-214.

[30] Susan Niditch, "Wars in the Hebrew Bible and Contemporary Parallel," *Word & World* 15, no. 4 (1995), 410.

[31] See O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited,* 13.

[32] *Ibid.,* 49.

have the moral right to defend their lives and properties from the violent attacks of Islamic terrorists working within the region. Since the constitution of Nigeria allows self-defence, this option has increasingly garnered supporters among frustrated Christians in northern Nigeria who are greatly dissatisfied with the promised protection of the Nigerian government in areas with Christian populations. In the ideal exercise of this position, Christians should respond in defence against violent attacks meted by the terrorists. For the sympathizers of this position, Christians should not initiate attacks, but when they are attacked they should actively respond in self-defence. The rationale behind this position is that Christians cannot continue to turn the other cheek while Islamic terrorists increasingly seek to decimate Christian communities in this region. This position has also led to the militarization of the church in northern Nigeria, particularly with the church's leadership sanctioning the purchase of ammunition in order to appropriately carry out this defence. As a result of these incessant attacks, the church in some parts of the north has openly encouraged Christians to buy arms, while in other places the church has openly discouraged the use of arms. In some situations, the church has openly condemned the buying of arms for self-defence while secretly encouraging church members to do so. In the conundrum the church finds itself, she often struggles with the pacifist theology of the earlier missionaries and the modern realities of violence against the church in the religious landscape of northern Nigeria. The present predisposition to use arms in self-defence is an important ideological leap from her passivity towards violence in the past. In this consideration, one realizes that the church in northern Nigeria is seeking a realistic engagement of the present violent religious landscape by a re-interpretation of the missionary heritage, particularly the repulsion for violence.

It is from this perspective that we must understand the merits and demerits of this option for the church in northern Nigeria. Looking at the self-defence option, five merits of this position could be highlighted. First, this position acknowledges the sanctity of life and hence the need to defend it against wanton termination or destruction. In this understanding, human life is seen and treated as God's gift, and the responsibility is placed on humans to protect it. Second, this position has the government's backing since the Nigerian Constitution inscribes this right as fundamental for its citizens. Third, this position has the instinctive backing of human nature and the desire for self-preservation. Fourth, this position also reiterates the active part of the victim of violence against the aggressor, hence it discourages passivism in the face of violence. Lastly, this position has the benefit of planning before the occurrence of violence. It assumes the inevitability of violence and thereby using defensive security measures in advance in order to confront or avert the attacks of the aggressor. It seeks to change the status of the person attacked from being a victim to a person who takes personal responsibility for his life and taking the

needed measures to nullify the attack. In spite of these merits, the defence option raises serious problems. There are four problems that can be identified in this option as a theological response to violence. First, there is difficulty in clearly defining the boundaries between defence and offensive since there can never be "an exclusively defensive rationale for a war," which is "not associated with reparative or punitive aims.[33] "In its practical expression, "every just belligerent" self-defence option "must in fact have some . . . offensive objectives."[34] Second, under the guise of self-defence, Christians have embarked upon retaliation and reprisal attacks after jihadist attacks. In practice, self-defence has led to self-vindication and self-righteousness which has called for the extermination of one's foe or opponent. The notion that the opponent is in the wrong and the need to teach them a lesson has led to reprisal attacks in the name of self-defence. The wide room that this option leaves for retaliatory attacks casts doubt on it as an appropriate response to the problem of violence. Third, the self-defence option also uses violent means as the aggressor in its quest to confront violence. The justification for the use of violence in this consideration primarily comes from the purpose of self-preservation.

Consequently, the reasoning behind this option presupposes that violence in itself is not necessarily evil, but it could be used for good when used in self-preservation. Violence is therefore seen an ontological necessity in the matrix of nature because it enhances the preservation and sustenance of one's self. However, this usage of violent methods or means to preserve one's continuous existence also raises other problems. For example, if everyone employs violent means to preserve one's self, societies would degenerate into chaos since violence has an inherent tendency to breed further violence. In addition, the use of violence for self-defence is self-defeating because it also employs the same means employed by the aggressor. Understood on this premise, self-defence uses violence in almost the same way the aggressor uses it. On this deeper level, "the antagonistic structure of self-defence" becomes "itself morally problematic for Christians."[35] Consequently, self-defence turns one's self into the mirror of the aggressor with the ironic twist that the defender is using violence for the preservation of himself or herself and the extermination of the aggressor.

Lastly, the option of self-defence also often leads to self-delusion. For the Christian person, the basis of our defence is in God, and hence all quests to protect one's self without a due recognition of God's defining part in our protection is doomed to failure. Unfortunately, the reliance on ammunition

[33] O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited,* 55
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.,22.

and weapons for self-defence often takes our attention from the protective power of God to grant us safety and protection during attacks or violent outburst from Islamic militias. In this regard, O'Donovan rightly observed, "When self-defence, of state, community or individual, has the last word, paganism is restored."[36]

SHARED DEFENCE OPTION

Glen H. Stassen has observed that one of the cardinal aims of the Sermon on the Mount is the advocacy for "surprising, transforming initiatives of peacemaking"[37] Accordingly, this is a call by Jesus for "transforming initiatives, not legalistic prohibitions."[38] Working within these transforming initiatives, the paper advocates an alternative position. Having seen the merits and flaws of the preceding options to violence, our proposal lies in a position, which for lack of a better phrase, we call, "Shared Value Defence" or SVD. For this view, defence should move beyond the quest to merely protect life and property to the defence of common human values. The option for self-defence must move beyond the traditional boundaries of defence for the physical structures of the church to the defence of biblical and Christian values in public life. This option should seek to defend the sanctity of human life whether they are Christians or Muslims; to defend human rights for both adherents of the different faiths who are living in dehumanizing conditions all across northern Nigeria; to defend the rights of women and children of both faiths in order for them to live self-fulfilled lives in their various social locations; to defend transcendental values of justice and equity for adherents of both faiths; to defend the right of every Nigeria to live anywhere in northern Nigeria and to fight to restore the faith of Nigerians in the socio-political process. Thus, rather than, waiting only to defend physical properties during violent attacks, this option is primarily active during pre-crisis period in its campaign to defend the rights of both Christians and Muslims and underscoring the sanctity of life, the values of justice, equity and rights of minorities among the adherents of both faiths in northern Nigeria.[39]

---

[36] *Ibid.*, 9.

[37] See Glen H. Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21–7:12)," *JBL* 122, no. 2 (2003): 267–308.

[38] *Ibid.*, 280.

[39] Following Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre underscores the virtue of justice as fundamental in any political community. MacIntyre observes "When Aristotle praised justice as the first virtue of political life, he did so in such a way as to suggest that a community which lacks practical agreement on a conception of justice must also lack the necessary basis for political community" [See MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 244-255.cf. see also MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality*

In shared defence, rather than self-defence, the communities in northern Nigeria are positioned to pursue and seek ways in defending our common humanity through the defence of the common values of justice and equity than merely accumulating dangerous weapons in order to physically defend ourselves. Within this reasoning, self-defence is translated to shared defence of our values as human beings, whereby the church becomes actively involved in the protection and defence of rights which define our humanity and further sustain the expression of our humanness. On this consideration, the church in northern Nigeria should aim at shared defence of our humanity, and taking this campaign further beyond the ideological boundaries and limits of Islam in its description and labelling of the Christian person as the "other" or "Kafir."[40] This higher understanding of defence moves beyond the domain of mere self-defence and its vindictive reasoning to engage directly the socio-cultural and religious orientations which often turn Islamic communities in northern Nigeria into theatres of violence. In this quest for shared defence of our humanity and dignity, the religious systemic structures and cultural ideologies in Islamic and Christian communities would be confronted, engaged and shaped.

As a point of entry, the overriding importance of this option is that it proactively sees defence from the viewpoint of values rather than the narrow confines of the protection of lives and property.[41] However, in the long run, it accomplishes the preservation of physical life and property because it seeks the prerogative of values rather than mere brute advocacy for self-defence. In doing this, it presumes that self-defence should not be the starting point, but the end,

---

(Notre Dama: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988)]. In Nigeria, the failure of the political offices to deliver and exercise this virtue of justice has further inflamed the already volatile religious terrain of northern Nigeria.

[40]Unfortunately, religious intolerance often stands against the quest for mutual defense of our common humanity. Describing the intolerant character of religions in Nigeria, D. Pollefeyt observed, "In the last two decades Nigeria experienced events of tensions, violence and killings between Christians and Muslims. It is not unconnected with the complex nature of their interreligious and intercultural relationships, which have been that of religious fundamentalism and religious riots... most children and youth are educated within this framework and thus inclined to a blind faith. Religious intolerance is thus, to a great extent, the outcome of the way in which religious education is taught. It is therefore not surprising when we see children growing up very intolerant, exclusive, with lack of openness to dialogue." See D. Pollefeyt, "Religious (In) Tolerance and Religious Education in Nigeria: A Call for a Paradigm Shift," http://www.kuleuven.be/research/researchdatabase/ project/3H07/3H070660.htm (accessed 14 March 2009).

[41]On the centrality of "value-talk" in modern ethical discourse see Andrew J.B. Cameron, *Joined-up Life: A Christian Account of How Ethics Works* (England: IVP, 2011), 36–40.

because when the defence of commonly shared values is rightly understood, Muslims will embrace the idea of defending non-Muslim citizens, and Christians, non-Christian persons. Thus, self-defence loses its selfish and self-seeking character to the protection of persons who are not primarily the members of our faith, but who should be defended because they are human beings. This option seeks the defence of values rather than mere physical defence.

Considering the preceding, the option has five important merits. First, it is proactive. It does not wait for conflict, rather it undertakes to enforce and to defend common values shared by humanity. Second, it seeks the promotion of peaceful community through the defence of values which are important for peaceful human relationships. Third, it believes that wrong values create conflicts and that it is through change of values that conflicts can be eliminated. Thus it places the right emphasis on the root or source of violence in northern Nigeria. Fourth, this option gives importance to each member of the community because it emphasizes the need for transformation of values which are held by the different members of the community. Lastly, the option provides room for respect and the humane treatment of the opponents and thus situating itself beyond the ideological plane of the preceding options. In addition, the option has a Christian core since it encourages values which have biblical orientation as well as validation. This option seeks to provide solutions that have biblical template to the problems of violence in northern Nigeria. Unfortunately, these core values have not been seen or treated as shared values, rather each religious community in northern Nigeria has tried to appropriate these core values for itself and the good of its worshippers while ignoring adherents of the other faith.

CONCLUSION

History has shown that religious violence is endemic in the structure, orientation and worldview of the entire human race of every period. History has also shown that religious violence is often promoted and preceded by intolerant beliefs and values which later radically translate into open and violent confrontations.[42] Following the preceding discourse, the church in northern Nigeria ought to embark on positive and preventive actions which should speed up the peaceful process and thus helping to change the violent landscape of northern Nigeria. In this emphasis on value shift as advocated in this paper, the church must link the pursuit of peace with the attainment of the indispensable qualities of justice and righteousness for persons living within

---

[42]See William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York, NY Oxford University Press, 2009).

this region. It must also move beyond the call for physical self-defence to a more proactive call for the defence of shared values which mutually underscores the humanity and personhood of both Christians and Muslims.

It is also needful for the church to integrate moral reasoning on these theological lines to the political debate of the contemporary polity. This initiative would move the church's response from mere reaction at the time of religious crisis to a carefully thought-out proposal and plan that would be of practical benefit to its members before the eruption of crisis. The church should also provide appropriate platforms where local communities and religious groups will participate in the mutual expressions and practise of these common core values of justice and equity in northern Nigeria.

In the renewed atmosphere of reconciliation and forgiveness, the church in northern Nigeria must realize that the root of the religious violence lies in the clash of values. It is a battle of values and it is never won by means of physical arms. On this level of conflicting values, the church must make communal effort to radically change the existing values within its rank which has promoted a violent culture among the churches. It should preach a message of forgiveness and reconciliation to its members rather resulting to sermons of hatred and animosity which aggravate the delicate relationship between the two faiths.[43] In conclusion, Christians in northern Nigeria are generally peaceful and we must not allow this peaceful heritage to disappear. Rather, we should encourage, nurse and draw strength from this peaceful heritage in order to meet the contemporary violence at the religious borderlines through the celebration and promotion of common core values.

[43]Reconciliation is often a problematic term. Underscoring this, John De Gruchy observed, "the word 'reconciliation' is so overloaded with significance in some contexts and so emptied of meaning in others that it is no longer useful. However, as long as 'reconciliation' is ingrained in popular rhetoric and academic discourse and, more importantly, expresses the longings of many, it is necessary to clarify its use and ponder its significance. But we need to do so aware that 'reconciliation cannot be understood properly apart from the context in which it is used, and therefore in the light of the history of its usage" (See John De Gruchy, "Reconciliation," *Fields of Faith: Theology and Religious Studies for the Twenty-first Century,* eds. David Ford, et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005), 153). However, the church in northern Nigeria must seek practical ways in making sure that reconciliation moves beyond the superficial level of pet talk on the TV or radio to the level of subconscious acceptance of the other persons as a human being whose humanity and dignity are respected and protected.