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**Voices of Prospects, Potential and Challenges of Christianity: Christians Calling for Selves and Defence of Their Faith in Northern Nigeria**

By

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**Abstract**

Today our society is confronted by moral evil just as Paul of the Bible described in (Romans 1:21-32). This article concerns ecclesiology portraying voices of despair and desperation in a religiously violent environment. This is an indication that until now, religious violence on Christians in Northern Nigeria is unaddressed. In the complexities of living in a violent environment particularly in Northern Nigeria where it has been bedeviled by constant religious violence and recently made complicated by the activities of Boko Haram and armed Fulani herds men creates increasing fear in an unknown situation where people no longer know when they would be attacked especially people of Christian faith. The unbearable situation has resulted even in a divide among Christians themselves. Christians who had advocated and practised pacifism prior to 1980s, many of them now speak of, “no more checks left to turn” The fear of extremism caused by terrorists’ activities make them no longer feel safe and secured anymore. Those who use this religious method to cause violence can attack a nation and people of other faith to achieve goals they could not have on a typical battle field. Today, in context of the world and particularly in Nigeria, this phenomenon has become unbearable for most Christians. These violent acts and a host of others leave Christians in Northern Nigeria especially with fear, depression, despair, and uncertainty. Christians therefore have asked if they can now defend themselves and their won faith in the midst of continues religious violence. The article therefore, examined how Christians have been thrown into a sort of disposition resulting to a perspective of desiring for a counter response to religious violence. It describes the pathetic stories of Christians and to suggest useful ways that proffer solution that would help every Christian to live with eternity in mind and possibly endure the Christian faith. Several pitfalls that result to a poor response to religious violence have been discussed. The article argues that even in the midst of despair and desperation, God still remains the author of life and of, human beings, should not be thoughtlessly be destroyed. Rather they are required to save souls. This is the light of the reality that in Biblical times, Paul warned that the last days will be very bad (2 Timothy 3:1-5). The society in general would be marked by chaos, conflict, confusion and counterfeit religion. These violent days began during the New Testament period and it is getting worse since then. How worst would society become since the environment is becoming more violent full of evil? God’s creation is groaning while it awaits redemption (Romans 8:19-23). This groaning is growing intensely and frequently as each moment approaches. Apart from religious violence, there have been stories of earthquakes, tidal wars. Famines, floods, are no longer new news as recorded in (Matthew 24). When Jesus was on earth, he did not leave his disciples in ignorance either about wars that would come around them either by religious violence meted against them.

**Key Words:** Nigeria, Christians, Muslims, theology, missiology, religious violence, despair, depression, self-defence

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### **Introduction**

This article presents a phenomenological story of responses from Christians carried out after the religious violence which occurred in Jos, Plateau states on September 21, 2001 and in twelve other states of Northern Nigeria and subsequently over the years. Views of 84 Christians in thirteen states were sampled using qualitative method of research in Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Jos, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states. Dadang collected personal interviews conducted with “eighty-four Christians randomly selected, and seven participants each from thirteen states of Northern Nigeria were thoroughly analyzed and presented” (Dadang, 2014) The qualitative data that was collected from interviewees was transcribed, analyzed, and categorized in relation to the questions of the research, which is, can Christians in Northern Nigeria defend their faith?

Respondents’ responses were grouped in relation to the guiding or operational questions for the research and were coded to protect the identity of the respondents. The questions were clustered into four main groups: (1) social and religious context, (2) religious background and conversion experience, (3) causes of religious violence, and (4) possible solutions to the problem of religious violence. Recommendations were drawn from the analysis of the findings. The article reveals that the current situation in northern Nigeria requires both a theological and missiological responsive treatment to religious violence. Hence, the Christian trait portray Christians as belonging to heavenly citizenship and the God’s identity in Christians compels them to live in peace and calmness even in the face of violence.

### **Social and Religious Context**

The socio-religious represents that physical and social setting showed that people live and interact with each other prior to any religious violence initially. The findings show that 72.2% of the respondents claimed that Muslims, Christians, and those who practiced traditional religion coexisted peacefully well with each other in every community. There were 22.2% of respondents who indicated that the different religious groups showed respect for human life, and 5.6% expressed that there was some degree of social hostility. The findings further demonstrated that 94.4% respondents faced religious intolerance from Muslim hostility and British officials. The respondents’ views showed that preferential orientation continued when the British withdrew and independence was granted. It gives the Muslims freedom to advance the cause of Islam at the expense of those of them who came to Christian faith and adherents to traditional religion.

### **Religious Loyalty Prior to Conversion to Christianity**

The research understudied the religious loyalty of the respondents prior to conversion to Christianity, hence, two study questions were instrumental: How do Christians in Northern Nigeria describe what the Christian message means to them? What was the religious experience of Christians before their conversion? The first operational question was designed to have the interviewees describe what their religious background was prior to coming to

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Christianity. There were 93.4% of those interviewed who had no previous loyalties with Christianity. They shared the religious foundation of animism as found in the African continent. There were 5.6% who represented a group which had originated from a syncretistic form of Islam mixed with traditional animism, and 1.3% respondent represented a syncretistic religious background. These findings demonstrated that the majority of the respondents described their religious backgrounds in terms of religious beliefs which recognized spirits controlling the physical world. The majority of the respondents described their previous cultic fraternity with the power of *mana*. The majority of respondents presupposed that through their diligent sacrifice and compliance with the taboos, they make peace with the spirits to retain the power. The main benefit of this fraternity as reported by the majority of respondents was personal acquisition of power to confront any warring opponent. There were reports of some respondents receiving visits by deceased family members.

One area which the majority of respondents reported was spiritual power possession as a means to respond to religious violence. Thus, it was highly sought after by the majority of the respondents, who described themselves as previously controlled by a spiritual power. These situations resulted in what the majority of respondents described as a means by which religious violence could end. In traditional religion Steinbronn (2007:55), opines that, “These gods possess specific external world a powers called *mana* which can be made to adhere in objects such as charms or medicines.” It shows African religion is power controlling, as Okorocha (1992:168,169,170) notes, “the religiousness of any belief system in Africa is measured in terms of its *mana* context and its visibility in terms of its *mana* effect.” Okorocha (1992:174,175,176) continues that, “The missiological import of all this is that the African believes a religion to be useful and worthy of profession only if it embodies and imports power.”

### **Experience Prior to Conversion**

The second operational question was designed to have the interviewees describe their religious experience prior to conversion to Christianity. The findings demonstrate that before their conversion, 40.6% of the respondents described their lives as fearful; they constantly sought to appease the spirits of their gods to remain under protection. 21.6% was an inward fear of the unknown. When they found themselves in trouble, fear threw the respondents into uncertainty exclaiming that the gods had forsaken them! Following this, 14.9% respondents struggled with their personal sin. Constantly one, if not both, of these phenomenal situations were described. The respondents narrated their pre-conversion experience as being full of the struggle under fear of the unknown. In each of these situations, the respondents described some form of internal conflict before conversion.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It has been estimated that religious violence has taken the lives of 120 million Africans. The situation is different in Nigeria particularly in Northern Nigeria and the central states of the country. The nature of violence on Christians continues to deteriorate. Hundreds of thousands carry emotional scars that hardly heal because almost annually another round of bloodshed results in fresh losses. Examples of bloodshed can be recalled in context of Nigeria easily. On Thursday 25 September 2020, Fulani herds men armed attacked a village in Kaduna Vom in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State and killed five (5) Christians. This

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situation is worrisome and needs a solution. Hence there is justification for this article as a positive contribution to the prevailing problem.

### **Details of Conversion to Christianity**

The third operational question was as follows: “Describe clearly the location of your conversion. When did your conversion happen? Please, explain about your experience. Where were you: church, home, village?” The purpose for this operational question three progressed from the previous religious background and context toward the real events surrounding the phenomenon of conversion. The majority interviewed (37.5%) described interacting with missionaries and cross-cultural evangelism outside the church as the how and where they were converted. This was overwhelmingly true of those who had described themselves as previously involved in traditional religion. The next largest responses (25.6%) came from respondents who were uncertain of the location of their conversion. The church was the second most significant location (18.8%) identified by the respondents. Their personal residence (15.6%) was the other frequently cited location of conversion.

The data establish that the majority of those who experienced a conversion (58.2%) did so outside of the church building. The data establish that the missionaries conducted their operations primarily in the field, which is to say where the people live and work

### **Analyses of Conversion Experience**

The purpose of this question is to describe the events that surrounded the phenomena of the conversion experience. The majority of the respondents fell within three categories of conversion experience. They described either a desire for deep repentance (34.9%) or a sense of peace, confidence, and freedom (32.6%). The third category of respondents (20.6%) was not sure of when conversion occurred. After their conversion experience, many of the respondents described the release from bondage brought about by worship of spirits. Respondents interviewed identified freedom, peace, and trust as outcomes of their conversion into the Christian faith. Thus, Gill (2001:61) suggests that “Biblical gospel is not that humans can save themselves inwardly or that whatever happens outwardly is meant to be, but rather that a personal God loves them and that with divine help, they can freely love others.”

Gill (2001:61) goes to say that “human beings are not God, but humans can participate in the grace manifest in Christ and being forgiven by God, both give and receive joy.” Walther (1986:16) comments that, “The Gospel does not require anything, but it plants love into his heart and makes him capable of all good works and it demands nothing, but gives all.”

### **Causes of Religious Violence**

How do Christians in Northern Nigeria describe the cause of religious violence? This question was designed to identify how religious violence originated and the impact of this violence both for the community and the individual. 64.0% respondents described differences in religion to be cause for religious violence. 16.4% of responses described politics; economic situation, (9.8%) responses; and ethnic causes (4.1%). The last category of responses, 3.2% described a lack of discipleship in both Islam and Christianity to be cause for religious violence, and 1.6% respondents described God allow violence to chastise the church. This led to an inquiry on impact of religious violence on humanity.

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### **Impact of Religious Violence**

The majority of the respondents, 77.3% described religious violence as having a negative impact on them, and living in such a brutal environment compelled a Christian to respond to violence with violence. 11.9% described segregating themselves from living with Muslims, and the third group, 10.7 % described suspicion against Muslims. The results showed religious violence caused destruction of property, churches and mosques, injuries and deaths of people who were Christians, Muslims or pagans. Statistics showed religious violence also affected individuals.

### **Individual Experience of Religious Violence**

The majority of the respondents (78.6%) personally experienced religious violence against themselves. The next highest respondents (28.6%) described husbands, wives, or relatives who had been killed. There were also respondents (15.7%) who knew of friends and office colleagues who had been killed. Another category of respondents (12.8%) described having narrowly escaped death, and 8.6% of the respondents had personal loss of property, burning of their own churches, and loss of lives. Thus, most of the interviewees had experienced religious violence first-hand. Steinbronn (2007:52) observes that “For Muslims, the world is divided in the realm of Dar al-Islam. [There are] those who are subject to Islam and Mohammad’s message. [There are also those] who do not [and] are infidels and are Dar al-Harb, “the house of war.” This becomes the justification for radical Muslims to seek to kill Christians and to subjugate them by force to Islam or face death. This scenario had adverse impact on the church because many churches were burnt.

### **Impact of Religious Violence on the Church**

There were 35% of the respondents who stated that Pentecostal doctrine has infiltrated the Evangelical church over time. 15% of the respondents described ecumenical union with other churches as a significant impact on the Evangelical church. There were 10% of the respondents who placed emphasis on numerical growth as a significant impact on the Evangelical church. The majority of respondents, said that rapid church growth had led to the increasing influence upon numerical growth, without paying attention to the discipleship of those who had been converted leading to nominal life. This, in turn, led to fear on the part of the Muslim leaders and the rise of religious violence. What then could be the possible solution to religious violence to arrive at peaceful co-existence?

### **Possible Solutions to Religious Violence**

The majority of respondents, 48.3% described the implications of loving enemies in context of religious war. There were 21.6% of respondents who described the biblical teaching of loving one’s enemies and 11.6% described praying as a response. There were 3.3% of respondents described forgiveness and one respondent described developing friendship as means to counter religious violence. Thus, Christians identified the need to love their enemies according to Biblical teaching. But they find it difficult to do so in the face of recurring religious violence.

#### **Solutions to Religious Violence**

The majority of respondents (95.2%) stated that the solution to religious violence in Northern Nigeria was based on the use of self-defence in response. The majority of respondents considered the ongoing religious violence as a major threat not only to themselves, families, property, or churches, but to Christianity generally. The second group



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of respondents (3.5%) described the use of traditional power as means of additional response to religious violence, and the last group of respondents (2.0%) was undecided. Thus, the majority of interviewees felt that use of self-defence methods was justified as a deterrent to religious violence in Northern Nigeria.

## **Results**

This research provides a comprehensive look into the lives of the respondents. The respondents' answers provided an insider's perspective of what is occurring in the events surrounding their lives in the midst of a violent environment and their responses to same. While their responses may be difficult for other peoples' minds who have never experienced living in such an environment to comprehend, they remain the understood realities of the respondents. Edmund Crampton (19979:84) described as "fears of religious persecution and discrimination." Following their conversion, the overwhelming number of respondents described their early social and religious context as surrounded by discrimination, similar to what their loving founding fathers faced with both colonial officials and Muslims. The majority of those questioned reported experiences of religious violence against themselves. Earlier, pacifism remained a high priority among the respondents. The majority applied Biblical principles in response to religious violence until when they described it to be a religious war against them. In each case, the respondents described then resorting to violent response with self-defense. Based on these responses to the research questions, one gets a picture of the current situation of religious violence in Northern Nigeria, and the suffering which has occurred to the Christian believers even today in 2020.

### **Response to Religious Violence**

Christians consider violence as a missiological menace that has battered the testimony of the church and its witness. Christians initially responded to violence with a pacifist Biblical mandate. During pre-colonial days, non-Muslim groups who were not conquered by Islam lived under religious discrimination and oppression by Muslim military leaders. After the missionary societies jointly and independently resisted pro-Islamic colonial biases, the colonial authorities opened up the Hausa Muslim areas of Northern Nigeria to mission work. Religious violence continued after independence even more regularly. Christians took a non-violent approach in response and followed the teaching of Christ to show their love for Christ and their violent neighbours, the Muslims. Yet Muslims continued to discriminate and attacked Christians with violence.

Christians gradually got involved in an ecumenical basis through New Life for All and Christian Association of Nigeria groups in their struggles to seek religious freedom and tolerance. But Christians were not given fair hearing. Later, attention shifted during the 1960s to more aggressive struggles, culminating to constant religious war. Eventually, those Christians abandoned pacifism in view of their understanding that it is religious war and not persecution for their Christian faith. Research revealed that some Christians who claimed to have come to faith in Jesus Christ understand that Islam is an instrument of terror against the church requiring from them a violent response. They are antagonistic, suspicious, and seek retaliation towards their oppressors because Christians are always at the receiving end of any religious violence. There are some Christians who resort to the traditional powers of their ancestors when they are faced with violent issues in life. Their reliance on charms is perhaps due to the absence of a Biblical alternative.

Religious violence has escalated in Northern Nigeria, and that the roots of the problem predate the presence of British rule with its preferential treatment of Islam over

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Christianity. The change from prior pacifism to Evangelical Christians resorting to a violent response is due to the government's failure to protect them in what Evangelical Christians regard as a religious war. In search of a more proactive and powerful response, some Christians have accommodated the use of traditional charms, which are a compromise to their Christian faith and practice. The main question is: why do some Christians in Northern Nigeria resort to violent response to religious violence contrary to Biblical practice of pacifism? How can Christianity be presented as a violent religion with a mixture of traditional beliefs in responding to violence and at the same time witness to the world (Matthew 5:16)? The situation has theological-missiological implication.

## 5.2 Theological Implications

The study revealed situations that have theological implication to resorting to violent means to solve religious violence among Christians across Northern Nigeria. These situations are: (1) despair, desperation, uncertainty; (2) pitfalls in worldviews; (3) Pentecostal beliefs; (4) problem of growth in numbers; (5) lack of love; (6) lack of forgiveness and reconciliation; and (7) self-defence. Other factors could have contributed to religious violence in Evangelical churches, but the ones that have been pointed out are the main situations that came to the forefront in this study.

### **Despair, Desperation and Uncertainty**

Despair, desperation, and uncertainty are the major components for Evangelical Christians adopting resistance. From the beginning, when the Evangelical Christians started experiencing what they perceived to be religious violence against them, they expressed their trust in God through prayer, fleeing where possible, and their leaders made appeals to the appropriate government authorities. But as more anti-Christian violence erupted, it created an atmosphere of despair, desperation, uncertainty, and a sense of threat that needed a more theological solution. It was while in the process of exploring which would be the right response that Christians became confused, uncertain, and disunited in purpose. The events had not become stabilized enough to allow the Christians to work out better theological alternatives and methods of response. Taylor (1998:43, 44, 45, and 46) observes that in their despair they did not remember to ask, "Where are those who can teach us to pray for the enemy, to do well to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, to bless and not to curse?"

There are lessons from Paul's teaching for Christians who are find themselves in the midst of despair and uncertainty. Paul says that hardships, if embraced by faith as a painful, but gracious gift from a loving Father (Romans 8:28-29; 35-39) draw one deeper into a transforming fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:10). Such suffering produces a refined character filled with buoyant hope (Romans 5: 3-5). This is why the Evangelical Christian can view violence for the sake of Christ, like saving faith itself, as God's gift to His people and one that signifies their sonship (Romans 8:16-17; Philippians 1:28-30). Despair of life itself should create endurance and hope to help a Christian to be totally dependent on God (2 Corinthians 2:9).

### **Unconverted Traditional Worldview**

Miller (2005:9) notes that, "Only God's truth can bring release, freedom, and healing." The research findings showed that some Christians have kept their traditional worldview. Paul Hiebert (1985:33, 34, 35) describes that "there are three dimensions that Christians evaluate themselves are "biblical truth, feelings of people and addressing right and wrong in society."

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However, Fuller (1980:195) points out that pioneers who founded the Christians in Northern Nigeria “sought to contextualize the Gospel in cultural aspects as traditional clothing and local languages. So they opposed the wearing of Western clothes and the use of English.”

Pocock (2005:336,337,338) opines that “This theological perception of contextualization of traditional culture at the introduction of the Gospel negates the principles of critical and comprehensive religious dimensions.” In order to convert the traditional worldview of any culture, Hiebert (1985:33, 34, 35) points out that there are four steps to critical contextualization. “First is to engage phenomenological approach. Second is exegesis of the Scripture and use of hermeneutical bridge. Third critically evaluate beliefs and practices in the light of the Bible and fourth is to develop a new contextualized practice.” Hiebert’s method of critical contextualization needs to be appreciated by churches in Nigeria to engage better those members who tend to mix Biblical truth with traditional life. Such critical contextualization is not based on developing a new theological system, but rather based on helping people deal theologically and practically with issues at hand. When pastors are training people who recently came to faith from traditional backgrounds, it seems appropriate for them to look for Biblical norms and models to bring to their pagan ideas to see the ways in which God has already revealed himself in it and prepared it for the reception of the Christian faith. They are first taught that salvation is not obtained through general revelation (Romans 1:18-31).

The specifics needed for salvation come through faith as a result of special revelation. Scripture alone gives it. At the same time, bridges for people to understand the Gospel and its implications for church life are present in every culture, because God reveals himself to every culture long before they were converted to the new faith. The second comprehensive understanding of contextualizing in which Christians are guided is for them come to grips with the Biblical message, which shows that God is deeply concerned about human justice in every human society and for local believers to know that the kingdom of God is in their midst. Members are to be taught to understand that traditional ways of life, religion, customs, and social values of tribal society all may be redeemed and liberated by the Gospel of Christ. If such is not done, poorly taught Christians can easily revert to traditional practices and things that are not Bible-based.

### **Theological Pitfalls**

The findings revealed that Christians inherited the fundamentalists’ theological worldviews from their founding missionaries, in rejection of modernist theology. Christians usually adhered to pre-millennial dispensational views as against cognitive views. Biblical prophecy was a concern to them more than engagement and or reflection on the world around them. Earlier findings have already established that when the missionaries brought the Gospel, they aimed at only converting individuals. They failed to convert the cultures from which these individuals came. The founding missionaries’ theological worldviews again prevented them from bringing to light the conversion viewpoints of the decision-making process. Van Rheenen (2006:94,95) argues that “Conversion simply meant rejecting the old and accepting the new; rejection, retaining the old and rejecting the new; secularism, rejecting the old and rejecting the new; and syncretism, retaining the old and rejecting the new.” The implication for Christians in Northern Nigeria is that they became Christians without the benefit of a theology with which to confront crises. That also means most of them are ignorant regarding others, and hence there is shallow knowledge of the complete Biblical view of life in the



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world in which they live. The rise of Pentecostalism demonstrates the vacuum that this theological deficiency created.

### **Problem of Pentecostal Beliefs**

Findings showed that the entrance of the Gospel to village life as presented by the pioneers did not enable the young people to understand doctrinal standards that would help them to face life situations. Johnstone and Mandryk observed that young people in Protestant churches had been influenced by Pentecostalism. Johnstone and Mandryk (2010:489) argued “This is not only in relation to worship styles or charismatic perception to social issues, public speaking in tongues, prosperity Gospel, miraculous healing and deliverance from demonic powers.” Pentecostal styles of music, prayer, liturgy, and literal interpretation of Scripture do not present sound teaching of the Bible. Pentecostal worship appeals to the emotional rather than deep spiritual reflection. Pentecostal doctrines stress the experience of the filling of the Holy Spirit.

The emergence of Pentecostalism opened the way for ecumenical union with other churches who also taught wrong doctrines. Pentecostals promote zeal in personal evangelism and preaching more on miracles, extraordinary powers, and happenings, than true conversions of heart. This encourages a nominal life that fails to deal with the crises of daily Christian living. Protestant Christians need to learn from the Bible Hans-Martin (2013:368) notes that “Christians are to be soldiers of Christ who are Biblically nourished. They are to be soldiers of Christ who understand that the power struggles are already theirs and have been completed in the power of the finished work of Christ on the cross when Jesus said, ‘It is finished’” (John 19:30).

The pastors have the obligation to teach that the reason for church membership is to engage believers in real Christian discipleship and the growth of Christ’s body. The nominal Christian life is a problem among Christians because of the emphasis on growth in numbers rather than spiritual maturity and the equipping of their members for spiritual service. Findings showed that many Christians are attracted to Pentecostalism by its vibrant worship, promise of miracles, and prosperity Gospel teaching. Speaking on the challenge of the prosperity Gospel for Protestant Christians, Okwori (1995:5, 6, 7) notes that “the prosperity Gospel could not have originally been conceived in Africa.”

Although Pentecostal beliefs have influenced many Evangelical Christians in their worship styles and preaching, such beliefs appear to lack substance and Biblical context in preaching the appropriate Gospel of Christ. This in turn provoked a more violent response from increasingly radicalized Muslims.

### **Lack of Biblical Context**

Pentecostalism proclaims a transformational Gospel replacing the old ways of patriarchal and animistic domination with divine power available through the individual person and blood of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. Lives of individuals and communities are transformed, and God’s kingdom is extended. Its doctrinal beliefs include speaking in tongues, prosperity, extension of the efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ from atonement to every aspect of life, and a literal interpretation of the Word of God. Communities tend to turn their tickled ears to the glare of the Gospel and in so doing previously accepted customs and beliefs are exposed. This transformation and exposure seem to provoke vigorous reactions from those committed the old ways such as traditional rulers and/or those in politics. Traditionally, there is no clear demarcation between secular politics and religion. The one informs the other, so the spiritual

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is used in empowering the secular and it in turn rewards the secular's allegiance. Whether through traditional beliefs, Islam, or Christianity, religion is the context within which things operate. Pentecostals share this understanding of the religious basis to secular power. Pentecostals teach that instead of relying on the old ways, which they believe have resulted in the state's failure, they tend to offer a new way. In the Pentecostal view, the new way is actualized by transforming individuals, addressing the social problems and moral failings of the state, asserting the rule of the saints, and building new communities.

Despite their teaching on miracles and the prosperity Gospel, it appears from that Pentecostals place more emphasis on people acquiring the necessary skills to make life successful and on networking to get ahead. A new community is built through faith, hard work, and enterprise. However, it is observed that the new community of faith cannot be successful as long as the land remains alienated from its rightful owner through evil covenants made with spirits and other powers. Recovering the land is achieved through spiritual warfare, in a form of praying, fasting, and vocal assertion of God's power. Individuals, confident that they are in a privileged position as a child of God, can then actively engage the world around them. One of the evil forces that has alienated the land from God is Islam. Nigeria has become a byword of violence and insecurity, and it is up to Christians, the children of God, to expel them and restore righteousness. One of the interesting findings the researcher gathered was the way that Pentecostals interpret and take Scriptures out of context.

### **Misinterpretation of Scripture**

Seymour (1985:39, 53, 89), a black holiness preacher, maintained that "baptism of the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues was a second Pentecost replicating the first recorded in Acts 2." The early Pentecostal revival did not limit its impact to its membership. It shaped the way historians, social scientists and theologians have come to understand the origin of the movement.

Creech (2006:28) is of the opinion that "Azusa played a limited role in the institutional structures and social development in early Pentecostalism." Wacker (2001:380) offers a theological and historical meaning of the Pentecostal experience (1) Early Pentecostals believed they lived in a world constantly visited by supernatural activity to the extent that even the most mundane events were perceived as divine intervention, judgment, or blessings. (2) They expected that God would signal the second coming of Christ at any time. (3) Pentecostals preached ascetic doctrine, stressing the importance of perfection, strict moral ethics, and Biblical inerrancy. (4) They exhorted believers to shun all unnecessary material and carnal pleasures. (5) Finally, Pentecostal assumptions were viewed in light of their eschatological hopes. In time, Pentecostalism's expansion encountered obstacles. Burgess (2002:69) maintains that "early histories of the movement inevitably cast a long shadow over all subsequent efforts."

Noll (2000:386, 387) observes, "Despite revisions by recent Pentecostal historical scholars, who have corrected the Pentecostal theological biases of Bartleman and promoters from its origin, Pentecostalism traditionally relied on older secondary sources instead of primary sources." Pentecostals later lost sight. They did not separate historical events from their theological interpretation of eschatology. Pentecostals sought to re-enact elements of the Biblical text literally. Cox (1995:80) makes a comparison that "While early Pentecostal churches embraced the ascetic doctrine of classical Pentecostalism, the new wave of these churches strongly emphasize a Gospel of accumulation." Modern Pentecostalism encourages

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believers to accumulate wealth on earth in their Gospel of prosperity. The researcher observed that Evangelical pastors must teach members of their congregations sound Biblical doctrines in order to avoid the danger of Pentecostalism.

### **Problem of Growth in Numbers**

Findings confirmed that second generation Christians in Nigeria did not have the opportunity to be equipped by their planters (Ephesians 4:11). This contributed to some living nominal Christian lives, seeming outside the kingdom of Christ. Nominalism can lead to exerting deadening unscriptural views and inadequate preparation of seekers for baptism. Numerical growth translated into a nominal living. Because of inadequate Bible teaching, nominal Christians are likely to respond to violence in ways different from genuine believers in Christ. The situation is difficult to figure out because spiritual growth is beyond human measurement. In the researcher's over thirty years of leadership experience, when the need arose to interview someone for placement in pastoral and or administrative positions, it was always one of the most difficult moments because few could explain their Christian faith. Pastors have an obligation to teach their members that the reason for church membership is for true Christian discipleship and the growth and edification of the body of Christ. Nominal life is a problem among Evangelical Christians because of the emphasis on numerical growth rather than nurturing and equipping the members for stewardship (Acts 2:42-47).

There is this understanding from Paul's teaching that members of churches in the New Testament consisted of baptized believers who professed Jesus as Lord and Saviour. But it seems as if some Evangelical pastors do not adequately and regularly teach the importance of baptism. Witherington (1998:360,361) reminds Evangelical pastors that "Acts provides evidence that the early church regularly practiced those ordinances." It should be a concern in Evangelical churches that pastors leave to lay people the task of preparing new converts for baptism. Pastors and the Christian education departments of churches should know that equipping new converts prepares them for spiritual battle. It prepares them to stand firm in the midst of violence and other life crises. Such an important teaching should not be left to be handled by non-ordained laity with no theological background.

If church pastors want to have church members to be baptized believers who profess Jesus as Lord and Saviour, they should consider the importance of teaching the converts themselves. If they take that assignment seriously, those seeking baptism will be prepared in such a Biblical manner that they see themselves as part of the members of Christ's universal church who are truly regenerate (Philippians 4:3; 1 Timothy 2:19). If churches do what they can to ensure that converts are adequately taught so that they become members who are genuinely rooted in Christ's love, they will be able to discern why they suffer and live by the truth of the Gospel, instead of perceiving a violent response to life crises as a virtue. The church is to have a clear doctrinal stand. This further led to absence of love for enemies.

The findings showed that the problem among some Christians in Northern Nigeria is usually whether to respond to violence with violence or with love. Byang (1988:31) notes that "There are those Christians who generally agree there is no more "third cheek left to turn." The same God of war is the One who was crucified and commands his followers to work for the good of all and to love their enemies. Evangelical Christians are to refrain from taking lives created by God. Dadang (2005:22) notes that "Non-retaliation is not a matter of doctrinarism, but of discipleship. Non-retaliation is at the very heart of the Gospel and the Church's task is to attempt to spread this feast into the life of the world."

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Gill (2001:171) encourages that “this is why Christians are enjoined to be active makers in the present and are not permitted to believe peace will only occur in some messianic future.” Clouse (2001:82) states that “Theologically, God in grace is creating people, a people known as members of the kingdom of God. Christological, the full revelation of God is Jesus Christ in what he said, did, and was.” Kunhiyop (2004:133,151,161,162) makes a case that, “Christ was not advocating pacifism, but a constructive, non-violent resistance compatible with self-defence. Scriptures clearly forbid taking vengeance whether through violence or civil courts. Turning the other cheek is not a passive submission, but an active assertion of one’s dignity and value as a human being.”

The Gospel speaks to all aspects of life and meets the yearnings of the body, mind, and spirit. It engages stewardship in God’s world, past, present, and future. The absence of a clear understanding of the theology of the cross may have led to counter violence among some Christians in Northern Nigeria for absence of forgiveness and reconciliation. The findings revealed that there were only five out of eighty- four participants who indicated any interest in forgiving their enemies. It indicates that ninety-five percent of those interviewed simply gave up the idea of forgiveness, much less reconciling with their enemies. It appears that they see little relevance in forgiving their enemies, and they would prefer to continue in the culture of revenge. Some Christians appear to miss out on their daily living and interaction due to the resultant bitterness caused by violence. Inrig (2003:48) counsels that “where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and blessedness.”

Forgiveness is Christ Himself lifting the burden of the assailant. Forgiveness dilutes the power of the perpetrator to nothing. Although forgiveness is not reconciliation, a non-violent heart desires reconciliation. Miller (1996:168) observes that “practicing non-violence enables Christians to keep the door open to reconciliation and to keep the issues in focus.” Forgiveness is not reconciliation. Reconciliation takes place when everyone is convinced that their grievances have been resolved and when they know justice have been served. There is no reconciliation without achieving justice.

Dadang (2018:18) observes that unresolved bitterness is “like a small root that grows into a big tree. Bitterness Springs up in human hearts and can even overshadow their deepest spiritual relationship with God.” Forgiveness and reconciliation are not possible without implementing the command of Jesus to love one’s enemies and to forgive them. Brothers and sisters in churches in Northern Nigeria are called to apply only love of enemies and determination not to use force to win conflicts. Hatred and wars have never restored peace. Kober (2002:170) guides Christians by noting that “Reconciliation is not a planned program, but a life-style.” Miller (1996:168) counsels, that “practicing non-violence enables the Christians to keep the door open to reconciliation, and to keep the issues in focus.” The church has been called to the ministry of healing and reconciliation. However, it seems when one becomes the victim of aggression, self-defence is permitted for Christians. Self-defence has been adopted not only by Nigerian Christians in general. Nonetheless, the church is called to a ministry of healing and reconciliation.

Findings show that self- defence has been adopted among Christians in Northern Nigeria. Christians argue that when one is outside the protection of armed authority, possession of arms for protection of family and the weak is appropriate. In the light of continues killing Boko Haram and armed Herdsmen in Nigeria, a similar call for self-defence was made by a highly place Nigerian Catholic priest, Matthew Kuka (2020:7) that “Christians must defend their faith.” Kunhiyop (2004:161) maintains that “A position of nonviolent in dealing with oppression and injustice does not contradict a position of self-defence or defence

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of family, or even one's church." Christians are reminded that the position of nonviolence is on the basis of Christ's teaching. Christians is to engage the world by being light and salt in their community.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The current situation in northern Nigeria requires both a theological and missiological treatment to religious violence. First the Christian trait portray Christians as belonging to heavenly citizenship (Philippians 3:20). Hence, God's identity in Christians compels them to live in peace and calmness in a violent environment and situations (Romans 12:15). Secondly, evangelism and Christian witness to Jesus Christ is one distinctive Christian way of dealing with violence in Northern Nigeria (Matthew 5:13, 14). Thirdly, Christian's can approach violence, sufferings, persecution, and death with confidence that their heavenly ruler is aware, concerned, and involved (John 19:16). Fourthly, Christian leaders in Northern Nigeria must employ holistic approach which is embodied in social, emotional, physical and spiritual concerns. The most effective response to religious violence is to teach theological truth in the process of discipleship and maturing relationships (Matthew 28:19, 20). Sixth, instead of building walls of hatred against evil people, there is need for Christians who has the light of God in them to endeavor to love them with the Love of Christ. It is a reality that raising children and young people in a nation full of bloodshed can make couples wonder how things would look like for those children when they become adults. Yet, there is need for Christian parents to trust God and bring up their children in the way of the Lord so that they would grow up to learn how to forgive and to retaliate against their oppressors.



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