

Living Christianity in a Rapidly Changing Context: Proposals for Saving the Future from Today

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Abstract

Studies have continually revealed that the strength and center of world Christianity is moving from the North to the Global South. This shift presupposes that the Church in the Global South is the future for world Christianity. As such, with Nigeria situated in the Global South as the most populous country in Africa, a consideration of the socio-religious trends impacting Christianity, although negatively, is imperative. Religion in Nigeria is delicately interwoven into every sphere of society and culture. Hence, any significant religious imbalance influences every aspect of the society. To this end, this paper explores the impact religious violence is making on the social and religious experiences of Christians living in Nigeria. Modern scholarship that have so far attempted to address the subject of religious violence in Nigeria has failed to show how these violent experiences are negatively shaping and impacting Christian belief and practices in the public square. Laying emphasis on lived-out faith in the public square, this paper specifically considers the negative influences of religious violence and targeted terrorist attacks on the Christian society in Nigeria. It argues that the church has not adequately equipped the Christian community with viable theologies to enable them contend with the contemporary Nigerian lived experiences of religious violence and the orchestrated agenda of ethnic cleansing and land grabbing. To this extent, it proposes some action steps towards preserving the Christian faith for the benefits of the next generation. This article contributes by analyzing the impact of religious violence on the social and spiritual life of Christians in Nigeria, and proposing steps to preserve the Christian faith amid the rapidly changing context and challenges of violence.

Keywords:

living christianity; changing context; saving the future; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is said to have a population of more than 190 million people (United Nations Population Division, 2019) occupying a surface area of 923,768 square kilometers. This population score places Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa and the 7th most populous nation in the world (World Population Review, 2025). Such population score does not come without its complexities. One of such

complexities is the fact that Nigeria is divided across over 350 languages and ethnic groups (Walker, 2011). While this makes Nigeria an arsenal of culture and cultural diversity, it also makes it prone to ethnic conflicts, especially conflicts along the lines of land boundary and ethnic superiority. Intertwined within the sociological complexity of Nigeria are divisive tendencies being reinforced by a classed philosophy.

Hence, people are grouped according to social status, educational (dis)qualification, economic status, and even political affiliations. With such varied divisive tendencies within the country's social context, Nigerians seek for unity and belonging in their ethnic enclaves, and much more, in religion. Such bond is possible because religion is well integrated into every sphere of the Nigerian society. S. M. Nwoamah tells of how the Nigerian socio-economic and socio-political precincts possess religious overtones (Nwaomah, 2011). Afe Adogame rightly explains that every sphere of the Nigerian society is permeated with religion. He pointedly states, "religious ideas and world views continue to shape the ways that Nigerians explain, predict, and control the events and life circumstances that surround them" (Adogame, 2010, p. 480). That is to say, for the Nigerian, religion is the lens through which every person views and interprets events in life. Consequently, when such religious foundation is shaken or attacked, the implications are varied and widespread.

A brief look into the Nigerian religious atmosphere reveals that Nigeria has two major religions, Islam and Christianity. The unfortunate recurring contestations between these two religions have shown that the same force that binds a people can also divide a people. Expounding on this, Adogame comments that "religion has engendered ambivalences of peace and violence, cohesion and conflict, functionality and dysfunctionality – to the extent that commentators query whether religion is more of a bane than a boon to Nigeria's corporate existence" (Adogame, 2010, p. 480). It is my opinion that at its best, religion is a 'boon to Nigeria' but at its worst, religion is a 'bane.' Since religion in Nigeria has not been at its best, it has been drawn into the frontlines of battle. Such luring of religion has invited varied scholarship. However, studies on religious violence in Nigeria has mostly fallen into two traps; (1) only showing the political roots of religious violence while historicizing religious violence and explicating its complex nature (Turaki, 2010) or (2) only dealing with just/holy war and the appropriate moral or ethical response to such violence (Dadang, 2015).

Such approaches usually say little or nothing about the impact religious violence is making on a religious community, in this case the Christendom. It is against this background that this paper seeks to explore the implications of religious violence on a believing people. But before engaging its implications, it seems ideal to define the changing context of religious violence.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative approach, primarily utilizing a thorough review of existing literature, historical accounts, and media reports documenting religious violence, especially in regions such as Jos, Nigeria. The author draws on various secondary sources, including scholarly articles, news reports, and previous studies, to analyze the impact of religious violence on the Christian community in Nigeria.

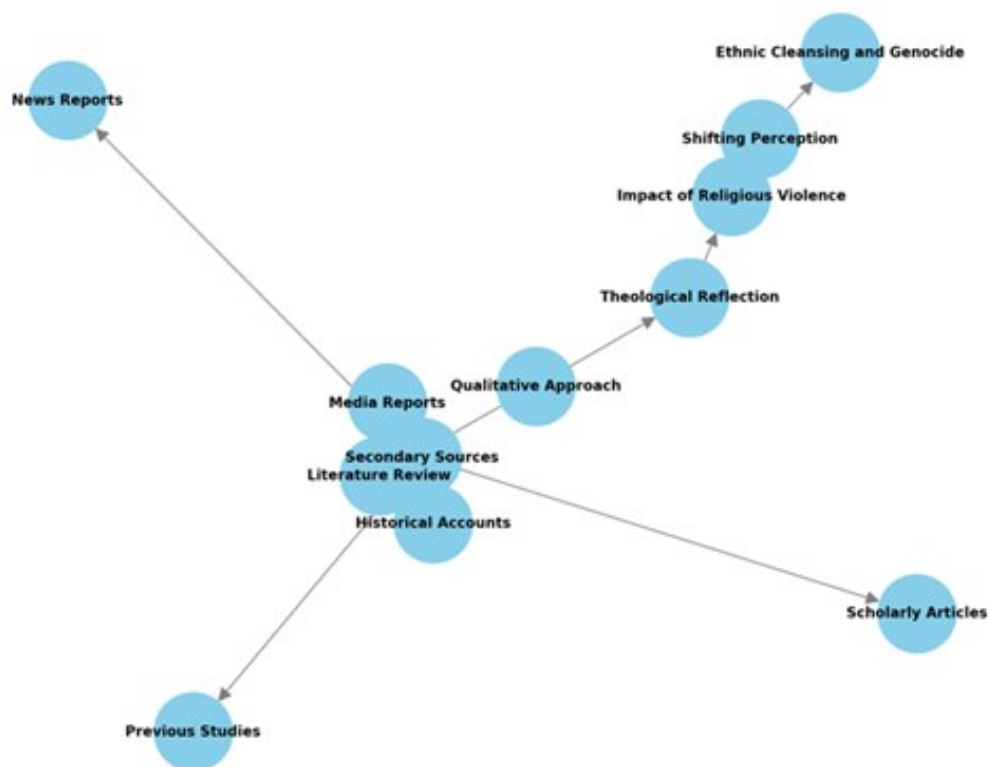


Figure 1. Flow of Research Methods

Additionally, the article incorporates theological reflection as a key component of its analytical framework, focusing on how religious violence has reshaped Christian beliefs and practices. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the evolving perception among Nigerian Christians, shifting from viewing violence as mere persecution to recognizing it as a form of ethnic cleansing and genocide. While the article

does not formally outline a distinct research methodology section, it employs a combination of literature review, theological analysis, and social observation to evaluate the influence of religious violence on Christianity in Nigeria.

RESULTS

A Rapidly Changing Context of Religious Violence in Nigeria

Historically, Nigeria as a country has staggered in the puddle of ethno-religious violence. These “mutual suspicion and lack of cordiality”, as B. Salawu phrases it, “explains why ethno-religious conflict have become a permanent feature of Nigeria as a nation as far back as 1980s to date” (Salawu, 2010, p. 346). That is to say, even before Nigeria celebrated her independence on October 1, 1960, ethno- religious violence has been a ‘resident evil.’ Drawing us back into the contemporary struggle, Joel Biwul says, “Of all world’s rival religions to Christianity, Islam is at the forefront of the onslaught on the Christian faith. It has been, still is, and will continue to be a threat to Christianity in Africa” (Biwul, 2016, p. 98). While I do not believe that Biwul is being prophetic in his claims, a brief look into the persistence of religious violence in Nigeria easily makes one to share in Biwul’s pessimism. Although both Christianity and Islam are siblings, tracing their roots to the Abrahamic covenant with YHWH, their exclusive monotheistic claims seem to be a major hindrance to their peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. Biwul argues that the tension between Christianity and Islam is a situation of brothers in conflict. In his explanation, Biwul upholds the popular opinion that Nigeria’s religious conflict situation is rather a multi-faceted one that has political and economic dimensions, religious dimensions, and sociological and ethnic dimensions (Biwul, 2017, p. 43-51). In essence, an exploration of the context of the Nigerian situation of religious violence should not fall into the trap of an oversimplification.

We stated previously that ethno-religious violence has pre-existed Nigerian independence. In recent history however, Nigeria has experienced violence in many faces. It can almost be stated that Nigeria is under a plaque of violence. These plaques manifest themselves as inter-religious clashes or crises, mass kidnapping (Chibok and Dapchi girls), community attacks by the so-called “unknown-gunmen”, Boko-Haram insurgency, Fulani Herdsmen attacks, genocidal attempts on communities, and the list goes on. Such violence has occurred spontaneously and more frequently since after the Jos April 2001 crises. Accordingly, reprisal attack has now become synonymous to such recurrent

communal attacks. This resonates with what Martin Luther King, Jr. firmly states, “There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair” (King Jr., 1963, p. 80). Indeed, the frequency and persistence of violence in Nigeria—especially along the Middle Belt and Northern parts of Nigeria—has made dry the cup of patience and tolerance by many Christians. This has resulted to at least two dominant changes in the social context of violence.

Normalization of Violence: The recurrence of religious violence has led to its normalization. It seems to have been smoothly amalgamated into the life of the Christian living in the Middle-Belt or the Northern parts of Nigeria. This is evidently seen when the same group of people that reject violence take up arms at the slightest indication of provocation that might lead to a crisis situation. Again, part of the normalization of violence is witnessed in the prompt response of ‘community B’ to the rumors of violence on ‘community A.’ One might have expected that ‘community B’ will march forth to help the attacked ‘community A,’ but more often than not, this ‘community B’ will champion a reprisal attack on a given ‘community C.’ This gives room for the easy escalation of violence. It does not take much effort to start a crisis that will claim many lives and properties.

Arguably, citing the case of Jos Plateau, in Nigeria, religious violence has also been normalized to the point that normalcy returns almost instantaneously after a religious crisis that had claimed many lives and properties. For instance, it can be recollected that it took several weeks for Jos city to gain its stability after the religious crises of April 2001. Conversely, it is observable in the recent Jos city crises for instance, that while people run for the safety of their lives on a given day, the same group of people resume their normal day-to-day activities after a day or two. The previous communal shock and slow recouping witnessed in the crises of April 2001 is no longer present. The persistence of religious violence has made the community as a whole numb to the excruciating impacts of violence, and this numbness has enabled them synthesize the possibility of violence into their daily living, hence, after a violent confrontation, life goes on as usual.

Socialization of Violence: Adding to the milieu of implications, the persistence of religious violence in Nigeria has not only become normalized, but it is also taking the form of socialization as well. For a long time, violence has had a social interface which resulted to the politicization of religious violence (Adogame, 2010, p. 486-489; Nwaomah, 2011, p.

95-96). In recent years, religious violence is observed to be taking a new social form. It is turning out to be a socializing event that affords both young and old the platform to prove their solidarity and allegiance. Hence, at the brink of an attack, a web of signals is created among friends, allies, faithful followers, and prospective initiates. Therefore, when violence breaks out in the form of a crisis situation, there is a growing social expectation of participation. It is fast growing and taking the form of some sort of community sport with a growing expectation of participation from at least a member of each household. Conversely, there is also a growing social stigma for those who decline from participation, especially those situated in communities witnessing an imminent threat. Like those players who would discuss their goals after a football (soccer) match, after a victorious combat, friends count their kills and discuss their victory. Sometimes, such tales leak out to the public and the heroes of the day get to enjoy an often-short-lived fame.

Living within a context of normalized and socialized violence hones its implications to the church and the Christian community. Hence, we shall focus our discussion on the impact religious violence is making on the Christian community, specifically focusing on Jos city, in Plateau State, Nigeria, one of the states and city that has been most affected by religious violence.

Impacts of Religious Violence

A Redefinition of the Christian Experience: The regularity of religious violence against the Christian community in Nigeria has led Christians to redefine their experience from that of a preexisting notion of persecution to that of a self-evident planned ethnic cleansing and orchestrated genocidal attempt. This shift in definition has not come without its implications. For example, in the Jos April 2001 religious crisis, several Christians in the Middle Belt refused to take up arms to fight nor to resist. A lot believed that God is mighty in battle and able to save, hence, they refrained from the use of canal weapons. The appropriate response was fervent prayers. To this gain, several sessions of prayer and fasting were held with a focus on praying for God's deliverance and intervention, and several knelt praying for their persecutors till life was snatched out of them. As a result of this approach, more Christian casualties were recorded that year. Such a response by Christians was framed by the fact that the Christian communities had defined their experience as persecution against the Church; for, "the blood of the martyr is a seed for the church."

The persistent presence of violence and targeted terrorism—through religious crises, Boko-Haram, Fulani herdsmen, and the so-called “unknown-gunmen”—against the church did not help in sustaining the persecution narrative. Such violent persistence has led the Nigerian Christian community to reinterpret her lived experiences. Hence, her new perspective on religious violence as “ethnic cleansing, genocide and land grapping.” This redefinition has not come without cause. The newspapers of July 2010 narrate the gruesome slaughter at *Dogo na Hawa* (Dewan, 2023, p. 1-22; Howden, 2010).¹ While the papers tried to report the matter in a consumer-friendly manner, it was still obvious that the plan for *Dogo na Hawa* was that of a complete annihilation of a community. (Un)fortunately, no less than 200 people were reported dead that night (Obateru et al., 2019). Such cruelty was not about to be the last that the Middle Belt would face. Evidently, several villages within Plateau and Kaduna States subsequently have witnessed such form of an attempted ethnic cleansing.

People are slaughtered in their hundreds, thousands are left homeless, and ancestral lands have been snatched by the attackers from survivors who flee the onslaught. Such aggressive and violent clashes have caused many Nigerian Christians, especially those directly affected, unwilling to accept such premeditated attacks as any form of persecution. This hitherto spiritual interpretation of similar events is therefore sacrificed on the altar of social and pragmatic interpretations of “ethnic cleansing, genocide and land grapping.” It therefore naturally follows that the inhabitants of their ancestral land will arise to defend their heritage and inheritance.

The Hermeneutic of Nigeria being Israel: Another phase of the re-interpretation of violent religious events that tries to maintain some spiritual sentiments is that of redefining these violence in the light of a new hermeneutic. Such hermeneutical interpretation allows for the juxtaposition of the lived out Christian experience with that of the Israelite community in biblical times. This is pointedly seen in the reinterpretation propounded by some Nigerians, especially those living in Jos city. The logic states that Christians are the New Israel, and Jos is a Promised Land given by God himself. Therefore,

¹ Dogo Na Hawa is a settlement in Barkin Ladi district of Plateau State, Nigeria. It is mostly populated by people who identify as Christians; “Dogo Na Hawa Map,” *maplandia.com*, <http://www.maplandia.com/nigeria/plateau/barinkil/dogo-na-hawa/> (accessed August 28, 2019). Dogo Na Hawa is occupied by the Berom ethnic group of Plateau state and is one of the first communities in Plateau state that witnessed the threat of annihilation by the attempted genocide and ethnic cleansing reported to have been perpetrated by the Hausa-Fulani people grouping who are predominantly Muslim; “They Herded us into One Place and Started Chopping with Machetes...”

an immediate need arises for Nigerian Christians to act like the Israelites did—one nation under God fighting to claim their possession. It then becomes imperative for God’s people to use any means possible to defend the land that has been given to them by God. In effect, during a crisis situation, a theme of victory has been added to the prayer lexicon.

Apart from the Middle Belt debatably being the center of Christianity in Nigeria, another factor (among many others) that has reinforced this new hermeneutic is the description of Jos city in acronymic terms. For a long time, the city of Jos has been defined as “Jesus Our Savior.” This makes it the only city in Nigeria that has God’s name in it. Thus, when violence persisted in the Middle-Belt—with Jos Plateau being the center of attention—people sought out explanations and in that process, the new hermeneutic that upholds Nigeria as God’s land given to God’s people, for God’s purposes emanated.

A Return to Fetish Ways: From being an innocent and unsuspecting people, the persistence of religious violence has resulted in some Christians’ going back to fetish ways for protection. It has been observed that when there is a conflict outbreak, some of those who take the stand to fight carry on their body charm amulets. More obviously, a people group in Jos, Plateau State, was reported to have returned to the shrines to resuscitate African Traditional Religious practice and so released killer bees on their attackers. That year, the intervention of the killer bees kept them safe from their attackers.

Cannibalism: The Christian community in Jos has been recorded in the pages of history to have eaten the flesh of their adversaries. This report of cannibalism is implicatory to the Christian community and the Christian witness. Such act of cannibalism was first witnessed within the Christian population during the September 2011 crises. The newspapers reported that, “Birom Christians eat roasted flesh of Muslims they killed in Jos, Nigeria” (Ahmed & Akins, 2012; Dickson, 2024). Unfortunately, this was only the beginning of such cannibalistic behaviors by Christians whenever religious violence erupts in Jos and its environs. The participants in this seemingly cannibalistic behavior may not necessarily be true converts to the Christian faith; yet, that they are not identified as Muslims, impedes the gospel.

A Theology of Suspicion and Questioning: Just as is the case with many who fall into desperate situations, Nigerian Christians have also asked God-questions. Christians have wondered if God has abandoned Nigeria. Others have joined in asking if God’s hands

are too short to reach out and save Nigeria.² Such questioning is made evident in the public and communal prayers of several Christians of varied denominations. Consequently, when such prayers are perceived as unanswered due to the persistent violence, some begin to suspect that God is in need of help. Such suspicion has led proponents of violent confrontation to theorize that God uses human instruments. Hence, they are the human instruments that heaven wants to use to protect the Christian community. Consequently, the proliferation of the erroneous ideology—supposedly rooted in scriptures—which states that “heaven helps those who help themselves.” Same idea is propounded in Hausa language when it is stated that “*Ubangiji ya che tashi in taimake ka.*” That is, “The Lord says, ‘rise up (or wake up) and I will help you.’”

DISCUSSION

Theological Impetus

Protestantism: Mainline and protestant theology takes seriously the omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence and infallibility of God. These attributes color their theology and is clearly reflected in sermons. While sustaining that these theologies are appropriate, such attributes have not been preached in ways that secure the faith in crises situations. For instance, since it is true that God is all powerful, all knowing, ever present, and just, without the ability to do wrong, where then is this God when Nigerian Christians are being slaughtered during religious Crises? To put this question in the words of Swinburne, “This world is a clearly providential world...And yet animals and humans suffer...and they cause each other to suffer (we hurt and maim each other and cause each other to starve). The world, that is, contains much evil. An omnipotent God could have prevented this evil, and surely a perfectly good and omnipotent God would have done so” (Swinburne, 2010, p. 84). The critical point at issue for many Christians in Nigeria is, can the attributes of God be reconciled with the forces of evil reflected in persistent religious violence in Nigeria? In order to faithfully maintain these attributes of God in light of the current situation of persistent religious violence, Nigerian Christians—lay people and ministers alike—have fallen into the dilemma of Job’s friends. Like them, Nigerian Christians have sought to blame themselves or the country for the violence being experienced. Hall discusses such blaming as an “incapacity to suffer” (Hall, 1986, p. 41-

² Numbers 11:23; Isaiah 59:1.

47). Such self-guilt and communal blame has made fertile grounds for the growth of the negative effects discussed above.

Pentecostalism: Modern Pentecostalism in Nigeria has been landmarked by an emphasis on the material gains of Christianity, as such, there is an overemphasis on material possessions as a reward for faithfulness. This theory disguised as a theology has been referred to as the prosperity gospel. Femi Adeleye, refusing to be persuaded by the deception of prosperity gospel, refers to the preachers of prosperity as preachers of a different gospel (Adeleye, 2011). Such material characterization of the Christian gospel presents God as a merchant who rewards his customers based on the value of their investments. An example of such business-model Christianity is reflected by a new church in Jos, Nigeria, the “Christ as of Old Ministries” also known as “God of Now Now Now.” This ministry promises her members not only a proportionate immediate return from the “seed they sow”, but a double return. Consequently, when things are not well with you, or when you desire a great breakthrough, the simple solution is to sow more seeds.

It is hard for one to not admire the ingenuity of this prosperity gospels and also marvel at the gullibility of their followers. Notwithstanding, the simplistic answer of seed sowing does not prepare the Nigerian Christian to confront religious violence, especially persistent religious violence. Although a Christian may continue sowing seeds at first, the persistence of religious violence against this faithful seed sower and tithe giver may cause the individual to seek out other alternatives for survival, thus landing in the pitfalls explained above.

Proposals to a Corrective Future

Balanced Orthodoxy: Okafor does not deny that there are other factors responsible for the conflicts in Africa (e.g., political, social and economic), but Okafor still believes that, “there are grounds to suspect that the root of the problem is particular religious doctrines” (Okafor, 2014, p. 423). If Okafor’s claim is admissible, religious doctrines must play a vital role in the corrective process. Doctrines that place an expectation on God to act in some violent way must be kept at bay, or at least held in balance with other doctrines that reflects the presence of God in suffering. While it has been established that doctrines such as the omniscience, omnipotence, and infallibility of God have not been presented in ways that are helpful to a believing community plagued by evil (religious violence), such religious doctrines should however not be discarded. Alvin Platinga

(1998, p. 22-49) has sufficiently explained, that the existence of such evil does not negate the power nor goodness of God. Suffice it to also state that the presence of such evil on a believing community does not imply that God is punishing them for their sins. It does not either suggest that God is in need of help in order to curtail violence or preserve the Christian community in Nigeria. Hence, passages such as Psalms 46:10 should also gain recognition among Nigerian Christians facing persistent violence. In addition, Nigerian Christians, as rational beings, need to be made aware—especially by the religious leaders—about their constitutional rights and the means to preserve it within the ambit of the law.

God, an Eternal Encouragement: In 2017, we were gathered for a regular weekly prayer meeting in one of the ECWA³ Churches located in Jos, Nigeria. While we were reflecting on the political mishaps and security challenges and instability, the clergy leading the prayers that day read 2 Thessalonians 2:16 and focused our attention on the fact that God is the one who grants eternal encouragement. In effect, even in moments of terror and despair, God is there present warming the hearts of believers and granting to them the encouragement they need to live on productively. The leading clergy mentioned that even though we have experienced desperate situations of violence and other ferocious circumstances, we are not broken nor are we living in despair because God is granting us eternal encouragement. The resultant effect of this meeting is that all who were in attendance left with a happy smile and an uplifted spirit. Such should be the duty of the preacher who shepherds a people confronted by religious violence. Rather than propounding a theology of questioning and suspicion, the preacher should be able to lead their people to understand God's sustaining activity amidst adversary. Otis Moss describes such preaching as "blue not preaching." Moss further explains that Blue Note preaching "is prophetic preaching—preaching about tragedy, but refusing to fall into despair" (Moss III, 2015, p. 6). It is "conjur[ing] life from death's domain" (Moss III, 2015, p. 15). And as Moss shows, the Psalmist is a good model.

Promulgating God as 'Εμμανουήλ: The concept of 'Εμμανουήλ as presented in Matthew 1:23 speaks of God as being "with us", not for us and against our enemies. The current images and metaphors used for God in many Nigerian churches—Such as, mighty man in battle, our defender, lion of the tribe of Judah—are those that suggest that God is

³ The acronym ECWA means The Evangelical Church Winning All.

for us. Therefore, in times of violence, God needs to stand up and fight for us. On the contrary, the image of God as our Ἐμμανουήλ resonates the presence of God even amidst times of persecution. This image of God gives the Nigerian Christians a new lens through which they can see the outworking of God in a situation that is perceived to be negative. I believe it was such perception of God that enabled Melissa Raphael to find the face of God in Auschwitz. Although Raphael comes from a feminist point of view, thus seeking the “Female Face of God in Auschwitz”, Raphael speaks of a God who “did not redeem by mighty intervention but by care.” Ἐμμανουήλ is one who does not always save from terror, but saves in terror (Raphael, 2003, p. 117). Raphael further explains that “It is a God who does not rescue the lives of the victims, but one who sustains the sufferers in their struggle to maintain, as long as possible, a life of dignity and self-respect” (Raphael, 2003, p. 117). It is normal and natural to not see the hand or face of God at the moment of severe suffering and persecution, but, understanding that God is always with us, even if that means suffering with us will enable the sufferer to also see that although God may sometimes disappear from a situation of intense suffering, God never turns the face away from that particular suffering (Raphael, 2003, p. 113).

Church and State: As it was briefly stated earlier, the political sphere of Nigeria is highly religious. However, the long history of relationship between the church and state with its negative implications and connotations seem to have hindered the church from actively getting involved with the state. Another significant factor resulting to a poor interaction of the Nigerian church with the state is the popular narrative of politics being a ‘dirty game.’ Hence, those Christians involved in politics are considered as ‘dirty’ and sometimes seen as carnal people of faith. In other words, such Christians are construed as public sinners. In a redemptive attempt, it is crucial to state that although politics itself is amoral and innocent, it is significantly important for the transformed Christian person to get involved with politics and bring about a reformation of the political spheres. Having stated this, it is imperative for the church to get involved in politics because of the religious nature of Nigerian politics. It has been established that Nigerian religious violence has deeper roots than that of religion. One of such roots is that of land control and social and political influence. Because of this, the church cannot continue to be distant from politics. Besides, the Bible upholds that when the righteous reigns, the city rejoices (Prov 11:10; 28:12; 29:2). The “righteous church” of/in Nigeria must therefore get involved so as to produce such a peaceful and joyful city. The church’s active political

participation enhances its citizenship role to the state and helps to preserve the universal principle of justice, fairness and equity.

It must however be observed that, given the Nigerian complex context, what this integration of church and state will mean for the church, or how the church will get involved with the state, or the nature of the church's relationship with the state is a complex one that needs further research. There is no simplistic answer to this. But given the religious nature of Nigeria's political sociology, it is imperative for the church to consider an appropriate means of active involvement. We suggest that she first and foremost, unpacks and reinterpret her hitherto theology of compartmentalization of secular and religious life.

CONCLUSION

So far, I have attempted to narrate the complex nature of religious violence in Nigeria, highlighting some of the changes caused by its persistence. I have also shown the impact this ongoing violence is having on the Christian population in Jos, Nigeria. I contend that the church has been complicit in the negative effects of violence by propounding theologies that are not viable in a context of persistent religious violence. In a restorative attempt, several suggestions were made to uphold the reality of religious violence while maintaining the integrity of God and the veracity of the Christian faith. However, these suggestions neither support violent confrontation nor pacifism. Such discussions, I shall leave to ethicists. The point, however, remains that on the theological front, there still exists a need to develop supplementary images of God that neither explain away God's actions in times of crisis nor compel God to act in favor of a chosen group of people within a crisis situation.

Unless Nigerian Christians witnessing persistent religious violence are able to see God at work, even through continuous religious crises, the integrity of God and Christianity will continue to undergo alterations, leading to a form of Christianity guided by survival rather than faith. The church must redefine its appropriate civil engagement in society, clearly theologizing to its members their civic and legal duties to the state, and instructing them on how to act in an effort to sustain the faith in the presence of ongoing religious crises. It is this that will preserve the future of the faith in Nigeria.

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