

A Theological Analysis of Violence between Communities in Nigeria Today

by

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“They have come again!” was the cry of a woman with a 5 month-old baby on her back, running for her dear life. A disagreement during a buying and selling transaction between a Hausa-Fulani Muslim and a non-Muslim in one of the local markets in Kaduna state has just happened. Saturday is the only market day of this community. Both Muslims and non-Muslims share this market. But it is not unusual for a fight to break out in the market on some disputes that have nothing to do with religion, yet it will immediately turn to a religious issue. Her cry caused pandemonium in the market and people ran toward different directions in search of a hide-out. People who are visitors to the area might not grasp the meaning of the phrase, “They have come again.” Its meaning does not stop at a previous event of violent conflict but it includes all other past violent conflicts that have been occurring, even prior to the British colonization of Nigeria. That means that this small incidence brings to memory the larger socio-historical, sociopolitical and socio-religious conflict situations in Nigeria. The word “again” has a deeper connotation than anyone can imagine. Therefore it refutes Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly’s assertion that 21st century humans, unlike their counterparts in bible times, are forgetful.¹ In Nigeria we remember past wrongs done to our great-grandparents; we find it extremely difficult to forget the past, even when we cannot define our situation with the precision it requires.

This paper argues that due to violent conflict, Nigeria is “dancing on the brink.” Violence is destroying us, but figuring out its nature and defining its theological implication with precision have often been difficult. To overcome this difficulty, this paper places Nigeria’s violence not only in its historical and theological perspectives but also in its global context. In so doing, it recognizes that conflict violence in Nigeria is not uniquely a Nigerian problem but the problem of a global world in which events in one part of the globe have a way of affecting the rest of the world.² Like the rest of the global world, Nigerians are paying a horrific cost in lives, money, property and freedom, thanks to the rising tide of global Islamic jihad. They are incurring intangible costs in loss of freedom, rising fear and impositions on their way of life.³

¹ Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, p.13.

² Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester: University of Rochester, 1998), 288; see also Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 189. Kalu maintains that ‘Everybody is affected by the integration and differentiation of global societies, which not only influences the theory of knowledge but has two other results: the emergence of a new culture and the intensification of culture and value clashes. As cultures are pressed together, the problem of identity looms large.’

³ At times we do not calculate these losses. In his article his article, “What Jihad has Cost Americans,” Guy Roger, Executive Director of ACT! for America enumerated the cost in human and intangible costs, such as the

The wind of modernity and postmodernity is blowing across the globe, challenging traditional institutions and systems of the diverse cultures of the world.⁴ The paper is therefore aware of the impact of the global phenomena of change that have taken place since the turn of the twentieth century. It analyzes Nigeria's violent situation and some of the pertinent theological issues or questions it raises.

Historical Overview of Conflict Violence

1. The Beginning

Nigeria is home to three religious communities: African Indigenous Religions (AIR), Islam and Christianity. Only AIR has the right to claim originality to the Nigerian soil. The two Abrahamic religions met AIR here. Islam spread in Nigeria through two phases. First, it spread across Hausaland through Arab merchants and traveling Islamic scholars in the 12th century. Secondly, Islam spread through the Usman dan Fodio jihad of 1804. The jihad took it beyond Hausa-Fulani territory. Dan Fodio's primary motive was to purify Islam.⁵ He launched an attack against African indigenous religions and within Islam. However, what started as Islamic purification quickly turned to a desire for economic and political power. Dan Fodio jihad's goal was the establishment of Islamic rule in Nigeria. He could not capture the north central (Middle Belt) and southeast. But the seed of present violence was sown. Consequently, Toyin Falola observes, "A religious divide separates Christians and Muslims, and long-standing intra-religious conflicts further divided the people."⁶ The nineteenth century marked the height of Muslim influence due to the successful jihad of dan Fodio and the establishment of Sokoto caliphate.⁷

Portuguese merchants brought Christianity to Nigeria through the coast in the 14th and 15th centuries but after they left Christianity could not survive. By and large, the activities of Western missionaries in the early part of the eighteenth century were characterized by failures.

way people are treated at public functions. In Nigeria, it is no longer safe to go to church or public functions. You leave home without the assurance of coming back alive.

⁴ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982), p.16. Berman documents the account of key events that have shaped our world since the invention of modern technologies. Berman writes, "The maelstrom of modern life has been fed from many sources: great discovering of the physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the whole tempo of life, generates new forms of corporate power and class struggle; immense demographic upheavals, severing millions of people from their ancestral habitats, hurling them halfway across the world into new lives; rapid and often cataclysmic urban growths; systems of mass communication, dynamic in their development, enveloping and binding together the most diverse people and societies; increasingly powerful national states, bureaucratically structured and operated, constantly striving to expand their powers; mass social movements of people, challenging their political and economic rulers, striving to gain some control over their lives; finally, bearing and driving all these people and institutions along, a never-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market."

⁵ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 25.

⁶ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 1.

⁷ Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1993), 4.

However, in the early nineteenth century Western missionaries made some breakthroughs in mission efforts in Nigeria. They advanced to the interior. According to Falola, “As Islam was spreading in the second half of the nineteenth century, Christianity was just laying its foundation”⁸ in the south. When Christianity got to the north, it had to confront Islam as an established religion. Aware of this situation, the early missionary efforts of Christian leaders such as Samuel Ajayi Crowther were diplomatic, emphasizing witness through dialogue and social action rather than confrontation. But due to the seed of bitter rivalry and violence the jihad had sown, the end of British rule opened the floodgates of horrific violence.⁹

2. *British Colonial Responses to Islam and Intercommunity Tensions in Nigeria*

Opinions vary as to how the British handled intercommunity tensions in Nigeria. Scholars seem to argue that the present situation of Nigeria is largely a British colonialists’ creation. Yusufu Turaki argues that the British created a society that they believed would not work after independence.¹⁰ Similarly, Falola asserts, “The British administration carefully avoided the creation of a formal or public role for religion. Not that it failed to recognize the existence and spread of both religions, but it chose instead to secularize [it] by introducing the institutions and structures of the new nation-state, which were then transferred to the Nigerian people at independence.”¹¹

There is no denying the fact that what is today known as Nigeria was a British creation; or better put, God used the British to create a nation, “to the praise of his glory.”¹² According to Falola, “By 1860 the British had established a foothold in Lagos, and thereafter began to interfere in the affairs of other areas, most notably the Niger Delta . . . and by 1903 Nigeria was fully colonized.”¹³ They established two protectorates: Southern and Northern. Lord Lugard amalgamated the two protectorates in 1914. Due to the influence of Islam and the dan Fodio jihad, the North was politically better established and organized under the Sokoto caliphate than the South. To minimize ethnic and religious tensions, the British adopted two forms of administrative strategies to maintain the peace: direct rule in the south and indirect rule in the north. They adopted the policy of noninterference; missionaries were not allowed to evangelize Hausa, except in the Middle Belt, where most of the ethnic groups had resisted dan Fodio’s jihad. The British colonialists successfully used the policy of administrative convenience—indirect rule—to interfere with dan Fodio aspiration of establishing Islamic rule in Nigeria.

3. *Post-Independence Responses to Islamic and Intercommunity Tensions in Nigeria*

Prior to independence, Nigeria had decided on a federal structure for its post-independence political system. To manage, intra/inter-ethnic rivalries, the country was divided into three

⁸ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 27.

⁹ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, p.27.

¹⁰ Yusufu Turaki, *British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria* (1993).

¹¹ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 40.

¹² Ephesians 1:14b (NIV).

¹³ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 51.

regions: southwest, southeast and north.¹⁴ After independence ethnic protests continued, and to manage that states were created.¹⁵

Shortly after independence, Nigeria went into serious political and religious crises. As Falola explains, “Interregional relations were characterized by profound hostility and uneven development. Minorities and southern ethnic groups feared Hausa-Fulani domination of the federal government, and every group complained of unequal development.”¹⁶ These threats led to civil war from 1967-1970 and the late 1980s religious violence and conflict. Since then, ethnic and religious identities became the political rallying points. Religion was used to consolidate existing identities and to forge new ones.¹⁷

4. *The Situation in the Last Ten Years*

The last ten years have been described as “Nigeria’s decade of bloodshed.”¹⁸ From 2001 to 2013, conservative estimate of victims of violence in Nigeria stands at between 50,000 to 60,000.¹⁹ Mutual suspicion and distrust continue to characterize Nigeria’s political and religious communities. Jan Boer states, “Both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria speak of each other’s grand plans to destroy each other.”²⁰ Nigerian Muslims see Nigeria’s secularism as the greatest threat. They assume that the present system favored Christianity. It is on this assumption that Muslims continue to push for the implementation of the Shari’a criminal law. “Both Christianity and Western values are criticized for making Nigeria excessively materialist, undignified, and morally decadent.”²¹ And to many devout Muslims, according to Falola, “the salvation of Nigeria depends on its drawing not on western political models, but from the model of the early *Umma* and its unification of political authority with moral and religious authority.”²²

The Maitatsine crisis of 1980 and the current Boko Haram sect follow the pattern of dan Fodio’s jihad. However, the current Boko Haram insurgency is not only based on his 1804 goal of Islam’s purification but also linked to the Arab spring insurgency. The Boko Haram sect is radical Muslim’s response to the growth of Christianity in Nigeria. That is why, according to Philip Jenkins, it is “one of the deadliest anti-Christian groups in West Africa” with links to al-Qaeda.²³ It does not spare Muslims who oppose its ideology. From 2009 when

¹⁴ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 52.

¹⁵ See Yusufu Turaki, “The Institutionalization of the Inferior Status and Socio-Political Role of the Non-Muslim Groups in the Colonial Hierarchical Structure of the Northern Region of Nigeria.” Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1982.

¹⁶ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 44.

¹⁷ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 44.”

¹⁸ Jan H. Boer, *Nigeria’s Decades of Blood: Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 1 (Belleville, ON: Essence Publishing, 2003), see chapter 2.

¹⁹ Reuters, retrieved on June 19, 2013 www.reuters.com/artclicles/2010/12/28/-nigeria-violence-clashes.idUSTR6-BR13T20101228.com

²⁰ Jan H. Boer, *Christians: Why We Reject Muslim Law: Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations—Vol.7* (Belleville, ON: Essence Publishing, 2008), 99.

²¹ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 74.

²² Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 73.

²³ Jenkins, “Third World War”, 24.

the sect started fighting government and all Western institutions in the country, including Christianity, 3,600 Nigerians and foreigners have been murdered by the group.

Boko Haram (Western education is forbidden) is not just a religious sect but the epitome of using religion to achieve economic and political power. Nigeria's violence has a lot to do with religious and political manipulation. The leaders of different political faction groups arm unemployed and unemployable youths against their perceived or real opponents. These youth groups eventually become independent of their pay-masters who usually abandon them after achieving their political objectives. They often metamorphose to a militia group, of which Boko Haram is a prime example.²⁴

5. Intra and Inter-community Dimension of the Violence

(a) Intra-community violence

The nature of current violence is both inter- and intra- community. This dimension of violence is not limited to Muslim-Christian relationship but also the African Indigenous religions. For example, in May 2013, a cultic group, *Ombatse* ('the time has come') in Nassarawa state ambushed and killed 88 secret security servicemen and policemen.

Islam contains such highly competitive and divergent groups as the Shiites, the Kharajites, the Sunni and others. The major intra-religious violence was the 1980-82 Maitatsine uprising in Kano which spilled over across the north. Thousands of people were killed.

In Christianity the crises between the mainline Protestant denominations and the Charismatic/Pentecostals have sometimes become violent.

(b) Inter-community violence

Interreligious violence started before Nigeria's independence. But it only became very explicit in the seventies. Shadrack Gaiya Best asserts that events in the Muslim world, particularly the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the radicalization of Northern Nigerian Islam through its contact with zealous and fundamentalist sects in other parts of the global community, made matters worse.²⁵ Prior to the seventies, Northern Nigerian Islam had interacted with more moderate interpretations like those in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt and the like.²⁶ What actually prompted such a paradigm shift?²⁷

Our decades are changing the pattern of social and political life. "Politics over the last three decades has been conducted in the name of religion. It began with the overthrow

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Criminal Politics: Violence, "Godfathers" and Corruption in Nigeria* (Human Rights Watch 19 (16A), <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/10660/section/1>, accessed on 27th April 2013), 2.

²⁵ Shadrack Gaiya Best, "Religion and Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria," *University of Jos Journal of Political Science*, Vol. II, No. III, December 2001, p. 63.

²⁶ Best, "Religion and Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria" p. 63.

²⁷ Jan H. Boer, *Muslims: Why We Rejected Secularism: Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations-Vol.4*, (Belleville, ON: Essence Publishing, 2005), 31.

of Raza Shah Pehlavi in Iran and the rise of Ayatollah Khoemini and his Islamic rule. This was celebrated as a revolution, and led to the creation of an Islamic state in Iran. In Bosnia and Rwanda too people suffered in the name of religion. Other changes which have made an impact on the world have been related to the collapse of socialist states and the emergence of US as the sole superpower of the world. It has also seen the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank and other economic institutions are presiding over the reorganization of the global economy. Islamic fundamentalism rose in alarming proportions—violence was witnessed in the form of Iraq-Iran war (1980).²⁸

At the turn of the 1980s, Nigerian Muslims watched an uncomfortable trend in Africa, particularly Nigerian Christianity.²⁹ “Beginning with the emergence in the 1890s of independent churches, fundamentalist and revivalist movements have been strong in Nigeria. Characterized by an emphasis on African dignity and pride, and usually controlled by charismatic Nigerian leaders, these churches tend to be uncompromising in their relations with Islam. The post-1975 Islamic tendency toward radicalism and fundamentalism has been evident among Christians as well, partly because the Nigerian state’s failure to meet the expectations of its citizens, and partly because of the increased challenge posed by Islam.”³⁰ Jenkins observes, “One factor driving Islamic militancy in many nations is the sense that Christianity is growing.”³¹ They realized it interferes with their goal of returning Islam to its past glorious civilization.³²

Five Major Theological Issues Raised by the Violence over Religion in Nigeria

From the foregoing analysis, this paper now adduces five major theological questions raised by the violence over religious domination in Nigeria. It compares two biblical texts—Genesis 4:1-8 and James 4:1-3—to give a thick definition of violence. To have a thick theological reflection on violence, we need to see it as a whole package, a system not a single event. Hamerton speaks of it as, “the system of sacred violence.”³³ The apostle Paul is helpful in discussing violence. He draws Christians’ attention to the schemes of the devil in Ephesians 6. Conscious of the schemes of the devil, Jürgen Moltmann says, “Before religious communities can contribute anything to world peace, they must themselves become religions of peace and overcome tendencies in their own traditions to hostility and the destruction of enemies.”³⁴

Firstly, what is the root of violence? In biblical and theological studies Christians have traditionally seen violence as the consequence of sin and the Fall. Violence is rooted in fallen human interaction with one another, in a world of needs and unsatisfied desires. Genesis 4:1-8

²⁸ Ram Puniyani, *Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times* (New Delhi, India: Sage Publications India, 2005), 12-13

²⁹ Philip Jenkins, “Third World War: The Real Showdown between Christian and Muslims Isn’t in the Mideast” *The American Conservative*, April 2010, p.24.

³⁰ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 47.

³¹ Philip Jenkins, “Third World War”, p.23.

³² Jenkins, “Third World War”, 24.

³³ Hamerton, *Sacred Violence*, p.15.

³⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Politics of Discipleship and Discipleship in Politics: Jürgen Moltmann Lectures in Dialogue with Mennonite Scholars*, edited by Willard M. Swartley (Eugene, OR:, Cascade Books, 2006), 132.

records that the first death in the Bible was a violent murder by Cain of his brother Abel—he ‘attacked his brother and killed him.’

Rene Girard speaks of violence as driven by “deformed mimetic desire.” Hamerton observes that “Girard’s particular contribution is the identification of violence as the energy of the social system” (p.17). The Cain narrative, of seeking the favour of God that Abel had without doing it God’s way, illustrates the pathology of violence against those who stand in the way of getting what is wanted or desired.

Girard again speaks of violence proceeding from someone preventing another ‘from appropriating the object they all desire through physical or other means.’³⁵ Girard’s theory of violence confirms that covetousness and jealousy, what he calls, ‘mimetic desire,’ pervades human relations.³⁶

In the recently sin-fractured society of Genesis 4 we also see violence rooted in human pride. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki explains, “This pride is the inherent desire within fallen humanity to be like God, not in terms of character, but in terms of power.”³⁷ Human beings live in a state of continual conflict and rivalry because of deformed desire and pride.

Secondly, “deformed mimetic desire” is seen within Christian communities. David P. Nystrom explains the intra-Christian community violence suggested within the James 4:1-3 passage: “James says that disputes come from the desires (*bedone*) within them.... This image is not unknown elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:11, Romans 7:22-23).”³⁸ I-Jin Loh and Howard A. Hatton suggest that this desire is related to anger and hatred.³⁹ This is why in verse 2 James says, “You kill and covet.” This is perhaps a reference to Genesis 4:1-8. As in Genesis, the reason for the killing includes anger rooted in covetousness and jealousy. Therefore, Nystrom concludes, “James is explaining that violence is never a solution worthy of pursuit. To choose the path of violence is to place oneself within a vicious cycle of retribution.”⁴⁰ The situation in Nigeria is not just about threats from outside the Christian community but also from within. By and large, the greatest threat that the Church in Nigeria faces is not Boko Haram, but human pride. This pride is characterized by doubt and lack of faith in the God who can do far more with and through those who believe in him than those people can ask for or even think about (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Thirdly, what issues does the “Love to Neighbor” principle of Jesus create? Humans are created for community life with others; “It is not good for man to be alone” principle

³⁵ Rene Girard, “Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism” *Berkshire Review* 14 (1979):9-19.

³⁶ Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) cited in Mark McEntire, *The Blood of Abel: The Violence Plot in the Hebrew Bible* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999), 1.

³⁷ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 29.

³⁸ David P. Nystrom, *The NIV Application commentary on James* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 223.

³⁹ I-Jin Loh and Howard A. Hatton, *Handbook on “The Letter from James”* (New York: United Bible Society, 1972), 138).

⁴⁰ Nystrom, *The NIV Application Commentary on James*, 224-5.

illustrates this truth. In this community life they are always encountering challenges. The love principle is given with the awareness of the schemes of the devil. What we need is what Paul speaks of as “love with faith” (Ephesians 6:23). As Desmond Tutu affirms, “We are human because we belong. We are made for community, for togetherness, for family, to exist in a delicate network of interdependence.”⁴¹ But in a violent society where trust has broken down, what are the implications of “love your neighbor”? To love our neighbors includes loving our enemies, even a suicide bomber. This love is anchored in the concept of God’s love, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace.⁴² In recommending that we love our neighbors as ourselves, God wants us to affirm the humanity of the other. We are able to love the enemy because we also stand in need of love and have experienced Christ’s love.

Whenever Christians who are faced with the situation of the threat of violence and how to respond are confronted with Jesus’ call to “turn the other cheek,” it seems to be a command coming from the theologians or the super-Christians. But Hamerton-Kelly helps us to appreciate the fact that

Nonviolence is an integral part of the gospel message, because it bases its teachings on the absolute value of love. There are the injunctions in the Sermon on the Mount to love one’s enemies, not to take revenge but to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:38-48, [Luke’s gospel on this matter]) [some have called this one of the hard sayings of Jesus]. There is the blessing of the peacemakers as children of God (Matt.5:9) and the instruction to be reconciled before offering sacrifice (Matt. 5:23-26). There is the “great commandment” to love God with all one’s heart and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Matt. 12:28-34). More than these specific injunctions there is the example of Jesus who resisted calls to defend himself violently, and went unresisting to his death. The tradition of Christian pacifism bases itself on the literal interpretation of these themes in the Gospels.⁴³

Fourthly, how are we to understand and apply the principle of forgiveness in this socially charged context?⁴⁴ Richard Rice-Oxley asserts, “Forgiveness stands at the heart of Christian faith and life. Jesus taught his disciples both to ask for and to offer forgiveness.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Casiano Floristan and Christian Duquoc remind us, “The practice of Christian forgiveness cannot be reduced to a mere ethical attitude. It is entry into the mystery of God’s saving love, whose kindness goes beyond all justice.”⁴⁶ But how do you forgive people who do not believe they are doing anything wrong, but rather they think you are the one in the wrong? How do you forgive people who will never stop stigmatizing you as infidel? Don’t Christians also stigmatize Muslims?

⁴¹ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Reader Books, 1999), 154.

⁴² John W. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 22.

⁴³ Hamerton, *Sacred Violence*, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Richard Rice-Oxley, *Forgiveness—the Way of Peace: Grove Ethical Studies*, No. 75 (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books Ltd, 1989), 3.

⁴⁵ Richard Rice-Oxley, *Forgiveness—the Way of Peace* (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books Ltd, 1989), 3.

⁴⁶ Casiano Floristan and Christian Duquoc, *Concilium: Forgiveness* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1986), x.

The narratives of Jesus and Stephen are our models. Jesus did not wait for the people who crucified him to confess before he prayed to the Father to forgive them.⁴⁷ Stephen did not wait for those who stoned him to ask for forgiveness before he prayed to God for their forgiveness. Leonardo Boff observes that forgiveness is power and enablement. Forgiveness creates a new social community. "God's forgiveness re-establishes our community vertically towards heaven; the forgiveness bestowed on those who have wronged us restores our community horizontally in all directions."⁴⁸ No wonder, Desmond Tutu asserts that the future depends on forgiveness.

Fifthly, what are the implications of understanding of violence raised by Islamic theology? Islamic theology represents diverse opinions on these matters, which are largely based on interpretation of Qur'an and the Hadith. In the Shari'a, according to Ibn Tamiyyah, "The goal is not to know God, but to obey him perfectly. The devout do not love God's essence (dhat) but his command (Shari'a)."⁴⁹ On the one hand, there are Muslim who do not support what the radicals are preaching and promoting. They often refer to surah 73:10, 11; where Muhammad, at the early days of his mission, urges his followers: "...be patient toward those who deny the truth..." and in surah 41:34 he says, "Repel (evil) with what is better." The radical Muslim preachers and their followers treat these Muslims as betrayals or saboteurs of the Muslim goal of establishing an ideal Islamic society in Nigeria.

On the other hand, there are Muslims in Nigeria whose ideologies are based on radicalized Islam.⁵⁰ To urge their followers to fight and kill, they often refer to the "Sword Verses": "Fighting is prescribed for you.... (2:216)." It is based on this attitude that Falola argues, "Islam has a tradition of militancy. While many take a quiescent approach to gaining converts and fortifying the faith, some believe that jihad is the only way to purify Islam and overcome paganism entirely. To Muslims bent on jihad, coexistence and accommodation are unnecessary, and even unacceptable."⁵¹ This section of the Muslim community is posing a challenge to the Christian community. Their theology does not have a place for other religions to coexist with Islam. What an impasse to the cause of social justice and love!

Conclusion

In spite of the rigid position of some Muslims, God is calling Christians to a deeper social and historical understanding of the past and present situation in Nigeria and a profound theological reflection to develop God-honoring ways of responding to this crisis which prevent an escalation of violence.

All too often violence in Nigeria is compounded because ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria 'use' theology to justify their own position and get power for themselves. Their political actors who control the states seek the means to profit from religion in a variety of ways—by using it to acquire power, stabilize or destabilize politics, consolidate political constituencies, and reinforce ethnic and religious identities. There is a need to find theological tools to undermine the roots of "deformed mimetic desire", or human "pride" There is an urgent

⁴⁷ Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 220.

⁴⁸ Leonardo Boff, *Onze Vader*, cited in Floristan and Duquoc, *Concilium: Forgiveness*, 9.

⁴⁹ Ibn Tamiyyah, cited in Robert Hunt, *Muslim Faith and Values: What Every Christian Should Know* (New York: The General Board Ministries, 2003), 129.

⁵⁰ Hunt, *Muslim Faith and Values*, 3-4.

⁵¹ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*, 46.

need for the Christian community to understand the theological implications and take the path of healing.