

## Religious Freedom and Jesus' Use of "Turn the other Cheek": The Implication of the Language of Violence for Nonviolent Peace-Building in Northern Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Sharing God's world within the structures of cultures, beliefs, values, language expression and traditions of men is an interesting area of study despite the complexities involved in the diverse nature of human perceptions and operations. The enigma of life is that there is a world all around us that is visible to the eyes, but which the human senses cannot completely comprehend, as it is only with the heart that one can truly see. Yet we live and we learn from the experiences we share with humans and nature. The harsh tension of growing intolerance and hostility among peoples of living faiths, especially Christians and Muslims, on the global level is part of the worrisome experiences which we all share today, aggravated by the use of despicable and uncouth language and incitement. The situation has built a tragic and difficult phenomenon within the religious world to fully comprehend and resolve. It is not uncommon therefore that the quest for religious freedom and tolerance is basically necessitated by these ruthless conditions of life. However, at the very foundation of a truly secured life is religious freedom characterized by the principle of tolerance, forbearance, encouraging language, justice and peace. It is therefore contradictory that against all kinds of arbitrariness, the tide of sporadic violence has arisen from the human desire to discriminate against or compel others to accept other persons' faith hence marring religious freedom. It is many such complex dynamics of religious hostilities prevalent in Northern Nigeria that calls for urgent attention and intervention. Thus we have carefully selected a biblical passage "Turn the other cheek" as reflection of the Christian imperative for encouraging religious nonviolent tolerance and freedom in a hostile society. The research is therefore undertaken to fast track attitudinal change and encouraging benign language as a necessity for cultivating fresh fields of peace. The goals of the research are strengthened by the strong conviction that the atmosphere for the promotion of peace and stability in Nigeria could be further enhanced if individuals or communities are allowed to exercise their conscience and express their faith freely without undue interference or coercion. When this is achieved the social, political and spiritual environment would be equipped with the right scheme and

orthopraxis for national innovation, development, prosperity, security and progress.

**Keywords:** Religious Freedom, "Other Cheek", Language, Violence, Nonviolence, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

The fundamental mission of God in history is to provide true happiness and safety to humanity and the entire created order. The mission of man, in effect, should not in any way contradict this purpose-driven fact. Nevertheless the reality of life is that man's assignment and scope of operation in the world have taken diverse dimensions, ranging from the positive to the negative pursuant to individual or group interests. The human charter of action however depends much on these real life experiences and sometimes on intuition. Such human experiences have guided attitudinal behaviors and change over time and are indisputable records of reference. The Bible is one of such records of human experiences that open the heart's inquisitive eyes to see and to act or refrain from acting; to speak good or to speak evil, and let the consequence run its full course.

One cannot doubt the sense that the norms enshrined in the Christian Scriptures and other written holy books or unwritten religious customs are unquestionable memoirs that direct human actions. For instance, if we read and digest our holy books well, we discover that the land(s), the earth and everything therein are God's and were made for specific purposes. Some skeptics would naturally think that the ethical principles taught by Jesus are abstract and infantile fantasies which have no significant or direct bearing on concrete socio-political and economic calculations. This is a common mistake even among academics of high scientific integrity. Thus, in the face of secular interests, some Christians choose to deny the gospel truth as being fallacious and impracticable ethical philosophies. This is nothing but the failure of faith in the Word of God or poor exegetical response to the message of Jesus. If we cast doubt on the His social ethics for practical living, we are bound also to cast doubt on scientific truths such as the mathematical figures, 1, 3, 8, or the triangle or square, and such legal axioms as justice and equity which when presented appear to be real but on face value are truly relational, circumstantial and transient or time bound. It is not not-common to claim together with Van der Walt (226) that secular public life cannot be clearly separated from personal religious life, because they influence each other since public life cannot be devoid of religious convictions, language and spirituality (cf. Matt. 12: 43-45).

Accordingly, Yakubu Pam and Katrina Korb (1, 7) support the idea that the stories we hear, and the words we use and share with our friends, families, colleagues and members of our communities shape our perspectives, perceptions, behaviors and the type of people we become. They further observed that Emmanuel Katongole had

earlier written concerning the attitude of people in religious circles saying, “who we are, who we are capable of becoming, depends very much on the stories we tell, the stories we listen to, and the stories we live. Stories not only shape our values, aims and goals; they define the range of what is desirable...” Therefore, positive stories help us to see the common humanity of all peoples. It follows without contradiction then that a fairly good survey of Christian ethics, messages and stories garnered from biblical passages provide us with the right direction and frame of mind to act justly, dispassionately and compassionately when dealing with matters of differences in beliefs and practice. Consequently, in contrast to these Scriptural stories, religious discrimination, despicable or provocative use of language, and/or coercion mingled with bad political practice often occur as result of misinterpretations and misconceptions giving rise in effect to uncontrollable social evil.

In Nigeria, and especially Northern Nigeria, hostility and violent conflicts are offshoots of religious intolerance, discrimination, offensive language, imposition or compulsion. This owes much of its reality from the variety of language application, information, beliefs and attitudes interpreted from our supposed religious Holy Writ, and by which the attitudes we exhibit in the society so emerge. In a morally under-developed society like ours where cunningness, deception, sharp practices in forms of corruption, and absolute exercise of oppressive powers are applauded, biblical passages that serve as checks against anti-human policies are considered affronts and would be hard to comply with, thus violent conflicts and chaos persist. However, the Jesus principle of “... whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also”, may not be an ultimate solution to religious or cultural discrimination, harassment and oppression, but it would to a great extent checkmate the urge and upsurge of enraged violence through acts of arbitrary vendetta, reprisal and counter-violence, especially among Christians of goodwill.

The fact remains though that religious tolerance and liberty are sine-qua-non for peace, security and unity; yet achieving these have always been an uphill task for adherents. Indeed, there can neither be unity in diversity nor true reconciliation without truth, justice, forgiveness, tolerance, slow to anger, use of benevolent words, simple show of unmerited love and the freedom to operate in a given society. All these principles of life symbolize the picture of Jesus’ teaching on “...turn the other cheek also” (Matt. 5:38, 39) and the golden moral rule, “So in everything do to others what you would have them do to you,” (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31), as mark of genuine human ethical practice and civilization. By these very imperatives, the true disciple of Jesus’ response to religious intolerance, compulsion or prejudice should be such that he/she shall overcome sufferings, temptations and undue hostilities with the order of longsuffering, lenience, compassion and nonviolence modeled on that of

Jesus Christ, who even when suffering unto death at the hands of assailants would pray saying, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The main questions however are, does the fragile human heart possess the spiritual force and obligation to comply altogether with these injunctions of Jesus, and even if some Christians do would it be all Christians, and would other religious traditions also comply? Is it possible to assert without reasonable doubt that the principles of religious freedom would ever be attainable? Religious freedom and peace depend much on the answers to these questions.

### **Religious Persecutions, Freedom and the Lessons of History**

In order to understand and operate within the dynamics of religious freedom and tolerance requisite for nurturing nonviolent peace in Northern Nigeria, and stability in especially every sane society, some fundamental ethical standards should be observed. This section highlights the process and historical framework by which religious persecutions, discrimination and compulsion on one hand stand out as resource for discrimination, victimization, and religious xenophobia responsible for pulsating violent repression, while on the other, the lessons from religious freedom and tolerance have equally helped devotees to eschew and dispirit ethno-religious and ethno-cultural hostilities. The focus here is to begin with the inciting character and potent nature of religious language, logic and conviction either as resources of encouraging the freedom of religion requisite for peace and stability, or for inverting religious freedom thereby resulting into wanton destruction of lives and property.

Religious beliefs and speeches have been used in various ways to mastermind ethnic and political upheavals, depending on the motive-designs of persons involved. The question had been, why is religious language exploited by people betrothed to inhuman violent struggles? Responding to this question, Richard Howell (18) alleges that Mark Juergensmeyer (1991, 386) had argued consistently saying, "By identifying an earthly worldly struggle with the cosmic struggle of order and disorder, good and evil, light and darkness, justice and injustice, political actors and religious leaders utilize the readily available way of thinking that justifies the use of violent means." In like manner, David Rapoport (658-677), had identified several features of Messianic movements which he believes lead to violence, many of which are characterized by a desire for antinomian liberation from oppression. Consequently, for religious language to lead to violence, it is essential for the pious to believe that the cosmic struggle is realizable in human terms. Given that religious language has great effect on the psychology of adherents, it is most effectively used as motivational tool to achieve political ends, and thus fuel the fires of ethnic and religious conflicts. It is therefore the egocentric employment of religious language to achieve and sustain selfish interests that creates needless animosities between

devotees. This is more so because nothing better unites and mobilizes people and resources for action than aggression and violence believed to be carried out in the spirit of defense of rights and freedom.

The training of children as future leaders of goodwill leading to peace and tranquility, or of perverse nature leading to insecurity and destruction of lives and property depends much on their knowledge of institutionalized beliefs and inculcation of knowledge through the usage of benign or vile language capable of molding the human character. It is in this regard that Van der Walt (11) affirms that parents should realize that what they say, do and teach influence their children's perception and faith development accountable for future action in their lives and in the public domain. The faith of children is simple and transparent (cf. Mk 10:13-16), full of trust and honor so that if well trained in the light of God's revelation and scriptures, it shall reflect in their whole attitudes and future approach to life in general. This has its roots in the Proverb..., which says: "It is not uncommon that the document of Vatican Council II (725-726) echoes the Christian ethical teaching which affirms that in the face of the present day situation of the world, mark as it is by the grave sin of injustice, we recognize both our responsibility and inability to overcome it by our own strength and frail human knowledge. Such a situation urges us to listen and learn with a humble and open heart to the Word of God as He teaches us new paths towards action in the course of justice in the world. Jesus by his action and teaching united in an indivisible way the relationship of man to God and of man to fellowman. Thus in his preaching he proclaims the Fatherhood of God towards all men and the intervention of God's justice on behalf of the needy and oppressed (Luke 6:21-23). For this reason, Jesus identifies himself with "the least of Brethren" (cf. Matt. 25:40). Therefore, faith in Christ and in God and the love of neighbor are inseparable. More so, if every man is believed to be the visible image of the invisible God and a brother of Jesus, the Christian finds in every man God Himself and God's absolute desire for justice and love. The Christian Church has received from Christ this very teaching and mission of preaching the Gospel message, which contains the message to turn away from evil to the love of the Father, universal brotherhood and consequent demand for justice and peace in the world for all men. The members of the Church as members of the society possess this same right and duty to promote the common good as do other citizens. The question, however, is whether this is ever attainable in a deceptive and hostile world.

### **Religious and Cultural Persecutions, Hostilities and Vindictive Faith-Persuasions**

The activity of men in the world is unpredictable, thus it often becomes difficult to predict and confront religious and political injustices and hostilities with precision. Thomas Johnson (8, 9) citing a report of the Pew Forum noted with

concern the fact that, "Three quarters of the world's population live in countries [with]... a high degree of menace to their faith – sometimes through government repression, sometimes through sectarian violence, and sometimes through the mounting culture wars..." In his opinion however, a civilized society must be marked by true freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Honesty and justice demand that 'the decisive differences between the world's vital beliefs are ultimate and irreducible – and their differences are crucial for both individuals and for societies and civilizations'. Consequently, the penultimate social moral norms, related to recognizing the human dignity of our neighbors, should provide a basis for civility and peace in society rather than the vile situations of violence the world is witnessing as a result of religious beliefs and practices inimical to the safety of lives and property, which has become difficult to curb today.

According to Thomas Schirmmacher (65, 67) a combination of racism, religion, politics and language barrier have constituted powerful apparatus for discrimination, segregation and violent conflicts. Practical examples of a combination of racism, nationalism and religious persecution, include among others, anti-Zionism; religious discrimination in Iraq where Christian population is under heavy persecution; Vietnam where the government is persecuting Montagnards, especially in the Central Vietnamese highlands, because these group have turned to Christianity; and Northern Ireland where from 1969 to 1998 Protestant British and Irish Catholics fought violent wars. Further, the Indian Caste System being the eldest form of quasi-racist structures, beginning with the conquest of Northern India by the Aryans around 1500 BC, for instance, has produced discrimination and inequality leading to various forms of procrastination. Schirmmacher further demonstrates that the first anti-Semitism was found among the Greeks and Egyptians beginning in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C. The "Invention of Judaism as a race in 1492 took place in Spain, where Jews who converted to Christianity were harshly persecuted due to alleged deception and conspiratorial intentions. In this situation, Judaism rather than being a religion became an indication of ancestry (70).

Furthermore, religion mixed with selfish political ambitions has great implications for victimization and persecution. Accordingly, Roshini Wickremesinhe (34) maintains that votes are essential to gain and preserve political power, and religion is a potent and emotive issue that determines the winning or losing of votes in an electoral process. Consequently, championing the religious rights of the majority against threats, real or imagined, makes popular political strategy, irrespective of whether the motive or motivation is genuine devotion to one's faith or cunning offshoot. In line with this perception of the bad mix of religion and politics, Christof Sauer (49, 61) documented a data bank based mainly on that indexed by Grim and Finke, collected from the 2003 International Religious Freedom Report of

the United States of America's State Department coded according to sociological standards. The analysis was though limited to 143 countries with population of 2 million or more, of the 195 countries in the report (cf. Grim & Finke 640-643). The findings reveal the global profile of religious persecution evident in the statistical frame below:

- Religious persecution is evident in every region of the globe, but is far greater in the Middle East and South Asia where only 3 out of 24 countries have no countries of religious persecution. Over half of the countries of Africa and East Asia reported some form of religious persecution, while in Europe and the Western Hemisphere the statistic stands at 40%.
- The global intensity of such persecution is high, considering that 25 countries had more than 1000 people abused or displaced, while in 14 of these countries the level of persecution exceeded 10,000 persons undergoing various forms of victimization.
- The records further show that in Nigeria, for instance, the social regulation of religion index is 9.3, while the Government Regulation of Religion Index (GRI) is 9.4 far above the national figure of 2 and 3.9 respectively. In consequence, the Christians and Muslims each add up to 45-50% of the national population with widespread societal discrimination and frequent clashes erupting among the country's ethnic groups. Yet another concern is with the 12 States in the North and Central region where the introduction of Shari'a in contravention of the Constitution of the Federation has occasioned the death of the approximately 60,000 people, mainly Christians and traditionalists who have suffered death and losses of property from these ethno-religious, political and economic conflicts that have taken religious coloration (cf. World Christian Encyclopaedia, 2000).

A serious impediment to religious freedom lies in the pseudo-holiness, oppression in God's name and the push for unjustifiable violence, which overzealous religious puritan believe that the only way to convert "unbelievers" to their own path is by coercion as a method of helping God to fight the course of purifying infidels from apostasy.

### **The Mission of Religious Liberty and the Right to Freedom of Conscience**

The vision of religious freedom, the rights to exercise of open conscience, spiritual reflection and association have all arisen in connection with the denial and abuses of basic human rights, and hostile attitudes towards the attainment of justice, freedom and security in the society. A focus on the Freedom of Religion is an important aspect of universal rights meant to be enjoyed by all men, as human persons under the law, without discrimination, fear or favor. It is therefore important

to examine those aspects that spell out the freedom of religion in the society as a practice, which promotes liberty and peaceful correlations requisite for national transformation and development.

Consequently, Article 1 sub-section 1-3 specifically reads concerning the freedom of religion the following code of conduct, which reads:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practices and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

It is important to observe here, without any undue sentiments, that:

*The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 General Assembly resolution 217 A as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected.*

(file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/The%20Universal%20Declaration%20of%20Human%20Rights%20\_%20United%20Nations.htm).

This understanding covers the scope of human reasoning and conscience everywhere and anywhere. Thus, accordingly, Pope Paul VI re-echoes in *DIGNITATIS HUMANAE (1965)*, that the foundations of the right to freedom of religion should include foremost what he sees as an unrestricted value to the dignity and wellbeing of humanity. He therefore concludes that such rights entail without any sense of contradiction a sense of the dignity of the human person, which has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man,<sup>(1)</sup> and whose demand is increasingly made that men should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty. In view of the fact that religious freedom is a practice sublimated in all religious traditions, it is imperative to consider, foremost, what Islam preaches about freedom of conscience and the liberty to practice one's beliefs and practices without hindrance and coercion. This will lay the foundation for Christian-Muslim relations in Northern Nigeria faced with



religious persecution and wanton destruction of lives and property in violation of the religious injunctions to protect life and the dignity and honor of the human person(s).

### **Religion and the Sublime Quest for Tolerance among other Religious Traditions**

Correlations for building religious freedom from other religious traditions, with particular reference to Islam, is an important mission in the world of evangelization in an unhealthy, fragile and sustainable cosmic *oikos*. Many educated and enlightened Islamic scholars have been of the view that Islam recognizes total freedom of religion as a mark of sustaining human rights and dignity. Accordingly, Zahid Aziz (1-2) speaking on right to religious freedom emphasized that the Holy Qur'an excludes compulsion from the sphere of religion. Thus, Q. 2: 256 say, without contradiction that: "there is no compulsion in religion- the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error". In furtherance with this philosophy, the Holy Qur'an is full of statements which reveal that a belief in any religious tradition is strictly the choice of a person's or groups' convictions, and so given the choice of adopting one way or the other. Therefore if one accepts the truth or rejects the same truth, it is for one's own good or detriment, as the case may be. Thus, the following verses from the Holy Qur'an stand out as exemplary evidences to be acknowledged and obeyed the believer trusts in the word of God as precepts to be followed:

- The truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe and let him who please disbelieve (18:29).
- Clear proofs have indeed come to you from your Lord; so whoever sees, it is for his own good; and whoever is blind, it is to his own harm. And I am not a keeper over you (6: 104)

In compliance with the will of God, the duty of the Messenger of Allah, and, following him, as well as the duty of every true and honest Muslim is only to deliver the message of truth and nothing else. The choice is that of the listener. It follows without contradiction therefore that according to the Qur'an and Allah's injunction to the Prophet:

- If they accept Islam, then they follow the right way; and if they turn back, your duty (O Prophet) it is only to deliver the message (3: 20)
- O people, the truth has indeed come to you from your Lord; so whoever goes aright, goes aright only for the good of his own soul; and whoever errs, errs only to its detriment. And I am not a custodian over you (10: 108; cf. 39:41)
- Your duty (O Prophet) is only to deliver the message, and Ours (God's) is to call (people) to account (13: 49).
- And if your Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them. Will you then force people till they are believers? (10:99) [2].

As a result of the immutable teaching of the Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, there exist a mutually respectful relationship between Muslims and peoples of other faiths. Thus, according to the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria Islamic Education Trust (12, 13), the passage below made a categorical statement as instruction to all Muslims to respect the freedom of religion as means of promoting peace and stability in the society:

*Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error: Whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, which never breaks. And Allah hears and knows all things (Q. 2: 256).*

Islam categorically demands nothing but a life compatible with the principles of religious freedom and the inviolability of peace. Therefore, to ensure the religious freedom of all persons, God not only, through the Holy Books and the Sunnah and Hadith of the Prophet, prohibits the destruction of places of worship, and empowers some people to come to the rescue of any oppressed religious community (DIN 6, cf. IbnHazm, cited in al-Qarafi, 'al-Furuq', vol. 3, 14).

It is in the light of the above Qur'anic assertions that the Islamic concept of "Turn the other cheek" finds meaning and relevance in supporting the principle of freedom of religion and the sustainability of peace, stability and prosperity in every society.

Accordingly, Abdullah bin Hamid Ali argued that although it is not known to many people in the light of violent images of Islam in the media, Islam also has a doctrine and history of passive resistance similar to that taught by Jesus in the Bible. For instance, during the first 13 years of the Prophet Muhammad's mission was characterized by passive resistance. It was actually a religious injunction for an adherent not to defend himself against the abuses of the enemy until God had provided a sanctuary for the Muslims of Mecca in the city of Medina and revealed the permission for them to fight back as the last resort (cf. Q. 22:39-40). Perhaps the greatest example of Islam's consideration of turning a blind eye to offenders is the Prophet Muhammad, especially as the Koran beseeches of him saying, "we send you not, but as a mercy for all creatures" (21:107). Secondly, during the major encounter with the pagans of Mecca in the battle of Uhud, Prophet Muhammad encouraged by one of his companions to ask God to curse his people responded, "I've not been sent as one who damns. Rather, I have been sent as an inviter and a mercy. O, Allah! Guide my people for indeed they know not." Certainly, the Koran has clear injunctions on the subject of surrendering one's rights to exact and extract vengeance from another when it commands saying:

- Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel (evil) with what is better; then will he between whom and you was hatred as it were your friend and intimate (41:34).

- Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious; for your Lord knows best, who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance (16: 125).
- And in the case of accidental murder, the Koran teaches: *Never should a believer kill a believer, except by mistake, and whoever kills a believer by mistake, it is ordained that he should free a believing slave and pay blood-money to the deceased family, unless they remit it freely* (4:92).

The believe of Islam therefore is that these passages in the Koran are few examples that leaves no one in doubt about the instructions of God concerning forgiveness, forbearance, restrain, turning a blind eye to abuses and pardon for the crime of murder as the higher ideal of belief as examples that encourage the doctrine of turning the other cheek and yielding one's right to exacting justice (Abdulla bin Hamid Ali – lamppostproductions.org).

Against these backgrounds, Aziz had further asked and tried to answer the question, why Muslims go to war and engage in needless slaughter of persons who do not share their belief or profess the same faith with them. His explanation further justifies the course which supports religious freedom, tolerance and honor for the sanctity of life. He reasoned that Muslims are allowed in certain circumstances to wage war only as they face severe persecution without any just cause, wherein the Qur'an permits them to fight; thus "permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. And Allah is able to assist them – those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah" – 22: 39, 40. In this regard, the object of allowing the Muslim to fight was not to compel the unbeliever to accept Islam, for it was against all the broad principles in which they had hitherto been brought up. Actually therefore it was to establish religious freedom, to stop all forms of religious persecutions, and to protect the house of worship of all religions (cf. Q. 22:40; 2: 190-193; 8:39). Thus apart from offering protection and security to an enemy, the Holy Prophet made treaties of peace with his enemies, such as that which brought about the famous truce of Hudaibiyah; the terms of which were disadvantageous to the Muslims (2). In consequence, there is to be no punishment for apostasy in accordance with the Qur'anic injunctions in Qur'an 2: 217; 5:54; 3:90 and 4:137).

Accordingly, Robert George places emphasis on a related document of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* in which the Church fathers pay tribute to all that is true and holy implying that there is much that is good and worthy in non-Christian faith including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. Presenting the natural law argument, the conclusion is that, for instance, Buddhism in its various forms also testifies to the essential inadequacy of the changing world. It proposes a

way of life by which men can with confidence and trust attain the state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own effort or by the aid of divine help (40, 42).

We cannot therefore overburden this paper with the numerous verses in the Qur'an which is already sufficient for orthopraxis from what has been stated. Thus it is important that the believer, be it a Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Judaizer or a Christian to follow the examples of their founders, if they so wish to promote the freedom of religion so as to encourage and promote peace, security, stability and the common good.

### **Religious Freedom within the Framework of Matthew 5:39**

The crusade to uphold the dignity of life, its security and ultimate happiness is a life-long struggle with maximal implications for human liberation and wellbeing. In the course of improving the quality of life and protecting the self-esteem of the human person, men of benevolence within history and from history have offered useful suggestions and equally served as models for meditation and practical accomplishments. In order to create the enabling atmosphere for individuals and groups to exercise their God-given potentials and their full range of freedom to improve, recreate and multiply the values of life within the religious, spiritual, economic, social, political and cultural spheres, the moral principle of freedom of religion and expression must be encouraged, safeguarded and taken seriously. The message of Paul in Philippians 2:2-5 is instructive, and it reads:

*Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory [selfish ambition]; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man only on his own interests, but every man also on the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that in Christ Jesus.*

The full force and significance of this biblical passage finds meaning and efficacy in Jesus' teaching on humility, love, compassion, solidarity, sincerity, forgiveness and reconciliation. It is against this background that Jesus is said to be our ultimate peace, life fulfillment and benefactor thus making it possible and imperative to emulate his self-emptying, unmerited love, self-sacrifice and vicarious suffering even unto death on account of others. Religious discrimination, inequality and imposition are alien and anti-Christ in every ramification because in Jesus, the ethnic, cultural and religious barriers and hostilities have been destroyed. He therefore consistently calls for restraint on religious matters that affect life on the negative side while he applauds and endorses racial-cultural respect or honor for all sane human beliefs and practices. Thus he emphatically affirms that "Judge not, that ye be not judged...Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of your own eye; and

then shall you see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matt. 7:1, 5), and so "...in everything do to others what you would have them do to you," (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31). What then shall we say, to cast aspersion on other people's beliefs and condemn them with impunity? Or accommodate, respect and recognize their rights to freedom of religious conscience, expression and participation? These questions lead us to the article of faith which forms the core concern of this paper, namely, under the burden of religious dissensions, dividing walls of hostility, persecution and discrimination, "offer no resistance to the wicked. Thus, "if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well...", and in like manner, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:38, 39, 43, 44, 45; cp. Rom. 12:9-21, 13:8-10).

### An Exposition of Matthew 5:39

> ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν μὴ ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ· ἀλλ' ὅστις σε ραπίζει εἰς τὴν δεξιὰν σιαγόνα [σου], στρέψον αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν ἄλλην· (Mat 5:39 BGT)

E~kóusate hótí erréthē: ofthalmón antí ofthalmoú kaí odónta antí odóntos. egœi dé légœ humín mœi antistēinai tœi ponēroï: all' hóstis se rhapízei eis tēin dexián siagóna [sou], strépson autœi kaí tēin állyn

*You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you 'Do not resist an evil person'. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

The reference to forgiveness, tolerance and undeserved love is represented powerfully in the text ἀλλ' ὅστις σε ραπίζει εἰς τὴν δεξιὰν σιαγόνα [σου], στρέψον αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν ἄλλην. (*If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*). This statement takes a seeming pacifist outlook rather than a nonviolent consideration, yet its interpretation would determine its meaning more or less as active resistance and thus constitutes the Christian's condition for practical operation as a nonviolent framework for socio-political action. Yet we must accept that interpretation varies and these determine to a greater extent the behavioral acceptability or non-acceptability of individuals and/or groups who react differently to the situations of hostilities, discriminations and ascendancies propelled by the forces of religious education, beliefs and arguments.

According to Darrel Anderson (web 1-4 of 5), the summary of Jesus' "turn the other cheek" entails that Christians should be meek and humble. Looking at the teaching, he reminds us that Jesus prefaces his instructions with an acknowledgement of the Mosaic Law, establishing the fact that Jesus had not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it. Thus restitution is not in breach of the law, but reasonable demand because before asking people to turn the other cheek, Jesus qualifies the statement by stating not to resist evil. In other words, Jesus is

acknowledging that the aggressor is acting wrongfully. Cheek slapping is intended to produce two results: i) to embarrass and insult, and ii) establish a hierarchy of relationships. He noted that in the times of Jesus, the left hand was considered unclean, and for many, to slap another on the right cheek means using the left hand. Yet some people could use the right hand to backslap. Thus in Jesus' time such a slap on the right cheek was doubly insulting. A non-Republican stance in <http://www.publicchristian.com> (1 & 2 of 18), summarizes this teaching of Jesus

The subsequent verses, which state that, "if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well, and if someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (vv. 40-41), have strong corresponding relations, which also goes to suggest that men should learn to endure pressures and pains without recourse to paying back evil with evil. However, there are basis for divergent views despite the fact that there is the general freedom to adopt God's will for resisting vengeance, irrespective of the level of provocation. This attitude also gives room for tolerance, forgiveness and nonviolent reaction.

Matthew Henry (Biblesoft) considers resisting of any ill attempt upon us as generally and expressly forbidden, as the resisting of the higher powers (Rom 13:2). But he shares the conviction that this does not repeal the law of self-preservation, and the care we are to take of our families. We may avoid evil and resist it, so far as is necessary to our own security, but we must not render evil for evil. It is not proper to bear a grudge or avenge ourselves, nor is it right to learn to be even with those that have treated us unkindly, but we must go beyond them by forgiving them (Prov. 20:22; 24:29; 25:21, 22; Rom 12:7). The law of retaliation must be made consistent with the law of love. And if any have injured us, we must not seek recompense by our own hands, but in the hands of God, to whose wrath we must give place or in the hands of his vice-regents, where it is necessary for the preservation of the public peace. Thus it will not justify us in hurting our brother to say that he began the trouble, for it is the second blow that makes the quarrel; and when we were injured, we had an opportunity not to justify our injuring him in return, but to show ourselves as true Disciples of Christ, by forgiving him. According to Keener therefore, the blow on the right cheek was the most grievous insult possible in the ancient world (apart from inflicting serious physical harm), and in many cultures was listed alongside the "eye for an eye" laws; both Jewish and Roman law permitted prosecution for this offense. A prophet might endure such ill treatment (1 Kings 22:24; Isa 50:6).

In some cultures killing for revenge is considered good and even a heroic act to do. However, God condemns all acts of murder or execution, thus he requires the death sentence of the murderer (Wilbur O'Donovan 68-69; cf. Deut. 5:17; Gen. 9:6). But if God condemns all forms of killing, whether as capital punishment or in defense of socio-political policies or in defense of faith, to my mind, it is not given

unto men the express right to put someone to death simply on grounds of faith, self defense or because he has committed murder. Killing the person will not correct him since he would no longer be present to realize his fault and to make amends. The death sentence should be left to God to execute, less it becomes prejudicial if the action is taken by men. This brings us to the question of mercy and forgiveness as opposed to reactionary vengeance and retaliation.

The piece of ethical message on compassion, forgiveness and tolerance is consistent with the sacredness of "turn the other cheek" mystified in the mystery of love. This awe-inspiring idea is reflected in the message of Paul to the Colossians that:

*...as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.*

The chronicles of our religious faith in the saving ministry of Jesus Christ expressed as love, which every Christian is expected to emulate and be clothed in its virtue is further expounded by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8, thus:

*Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...*

The passage is a deep reflection of what love really is and which corresponds firmly with the law of freedom where there is true freedom, tolerance where there is true tolerance, mercy where there is true mercy, forgiveness where there is true forgiveness, truth where there is genuine integrity and reconciliation where there is true reconciliation. It is in this sense that Jesus commands us saying, "...that you love one another, just as I have loved you" (Jn. 15: 12). The original Greek text in John 15: 13, which reads, μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῆ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ (i.e., "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends, BGT) entails that where there is love there is compassion, there is forgiveness, there is tolerance, there is justice, there is kindness, there is peace, there is reconciliation, and there is unity and general security. This means also that people can sacrifice for the sake of others despite divergent views, opinions and personal religious convictions. Coercion and discrimination among religious traditions based on sentiments and deceptions absolutely negate the very principle of the recognition of personal rights to freedom of association, expression and self-sacrifice on behalf of the other.

Nonetheless, there is no greater power than the supremacy of forgiveness, because in forgiveness we are forgiven. The message of Jesus on this matter is instructive: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt. 6:14, 15). It is through the acceptance of genuine confession and remorseful accountability on the part of the wrongdoer and the genuine show of mercy and forgiveness on the part of the victim of fatal abuse that reconciliation is made possible. Against this background we can possibly forgive a sworn enemy.

Reliable lessons for religious tolerance are profoundly embedded in the very nature of God revealed in the incarnate Word and Lord, Jesus. The following passages remain our weighty proofs and arguments in favor of the rights of beliefs and freedom to express our faith without hindrance:

- The LORD is compassionate and gracious; slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities (Psalms 103:8-10 NIV).
- Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs, so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy (Rom 15:7-9 NIV)

### **The 'Religious Freedom' Debate in the Context of the Northern Nigeria Experience**

The debate for instituting religious freedom and the mission declarations aimed at practical contribution to religious tolerance, resolution of religious chauvinism and isolation tailored towards the maintenance of peace and security in Nigeria has been a continuous challenge for governments, religious leaders, the political elite, and especially intellectuals in the area of law and diplomacy, religion and philosophy, theology, sociology, anthropology, political science and history. Though the debate is timely, the question is what has been the impact and to what extent have these human endeavors helped to reduce violence or increase violation of rights to freedom and life? This section draws attention to religious tenets, creedal defense and reckless persecutions in Northern Nigeria, either supposedly as means of liberation or as forces of destruction and dehumanization.

Nigeria is a country situated in West Africa between Benin Republic and Cameroun and borders the Gulf of Guinea. About 50% of the population is Muslim, 40% Christians and 10% identifies with local faiths with more than 250 ethnic groups co-existing in diversity. The Nigerian Constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and also permits people to change their faith willingly and to openly



profess their faith without hindrance or interference (Evangelical Fellowship of Canada 1).

Scientific investigation has shown that the extent and degree of violence and religious abuse have correlating factors. This is particularly associated with the harshest measures of restrictions on religion which has increased rather than attenuates everywhere (Grim 21). Among the plethora of problems that grossly undermine the humanness, spiritual and socio-economic development in Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts rank highest. Others include bad governance and corruption, and high level of illiteracy. The instrumentalism and instrumentalization of religion for the purpose of achieving wrongful and selfish socio-political and economic gains by the Nigerian political elite has often caused undue and unhealthy competition, rancor and havoc to the country and its teeming populace. In Nigeria, like other African countries, the violation of religious freedom under the international law is widespread, massive and intensive (Joseph and Rothfuss 74, 75; cf. Marshall 11), and it sometimes translates into retaliatory vengeance.

It is known that the most rapidly growing area of religious persecution and denial of the freedom of conscience are in the countries of Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa (Open Doors Report). Nigeria, in its geographical and socio-cultural setting, is a densely populated society with diverse demographic composition characteristic of its population. The situation of Nigeria reflects that there are millions of Christians and Muslims in both the Northern and southern regions. In respect of the north, for instance, 7 out of the 19 northern states Christians are in the majority. However, the North-western and North-Eastern regions have the largest concentration of Muslims. In comparison with the core north, southern Nigeria shows more religious tolerance and accommodation because in the south-west, for instance, Christians, Muslims and Afrelists co-exist together in relative harmony and mutual respect, as they share family ties through inter-marriage without discrimination, and for the fact that they share the same linguistic and cultural affiliations. The same situation is obtainable in the South-East and South-South. However, the core north and North central Nigeria has often become a beehive and hotbed of religious extremism, segregation and restrictions, most times resulting in very violent conflicts (Joseph and Rothfuss 75).

The Open Doors Report of 2015 have indicated that in 2014, for example, the countries where Christians experience the most abhorrent case of violence associated with religious intolerance and discrimination were Nigeria, Iraq, Syria, central African Republic, Sudan, Pakistan, Egypt, Burma, Mexico and Kenya. Joseph and Rothfuss (20, 78, 79) reveal that the adoption of Sharia by 12 Northern states had confined the Christian minorities to live in perpetual fear under difficult conditions and political challenges, especially where these disadvantaged groups

lack access to state own media, ascendancy to key positions in the public service and political spheres, which have been greatly impaired by religious discrimination and favoritism. The same applies to recruitment into the military, police operatives, State Security Service and other Para-military units. Further, in many parts of Northern Nigeria, Christians are often subjected to mob action by overzealous Islamists under the pretext of perceived provocation and sacrilege to religious tenets. Some examples of these accusations include the cartoon of prophet Muhammad published in Denmark, the American invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11, and the Newspaper commentary during the 2002 Miss World beauty pageant by Isioma Daniel. Some of these harsh conditions of religious intolerance had triggered counter-violence and reprisals in most states in the North-East, Central Nigeria and the core Northern States. Consequently, guerilla tactics and strategies had been adopted and emerged in 2010 to subdue Christians and indigenes in Plateau, Kaduna, Bauchi, Gombe States around Jos, Zangon Kataf, Tafawa Balewa. These residents have often come under covert night attacks with the aim of annihilation.

In most Nigerian States religious tension rose to a crescendo in the run up to the 2015 general elections. For instance, while the world media focused on the Islamic State (IS) violence in Iraq and Syria, Boko Haram proclaimed a similar or even harsher violent caliphate in the city of Gwoza in northern Nigeria, spreading to Borno, parts of Yobe, Adamawa and Taraba States. For example, it is on record that more than 4,000 deaths have been recorded and blamed on Boko Haram with about 650,000 displaced persons, 276 female students kidnapped from the Chibok School (Open Doors Report, 2015).

The countdown of religious persecution in Nigeria, especially in the North is far beyond full description in this paper if we are to do complete justice to it. However, suffice to say here that a summary of these as provided can serve the purpose of calling for tolerance amongst religious adherents and the call for the observance of religious liberty, the promotion of peace and security. In the foregoing, it is imperative to consider the application of religious and other socio-political usage of language in the society that may make or mar religious liberty, peaceful co-existence, security and progress in the presence of Nigeria's unity in diversity.

### **Violent and Nonviolent Application of Language and Implication for Peace Building in Northern Nigeria**

In Nigeria, and especially the northern and north-central regions, the turn of events have reflected very unfortunate developments with increased level of hostility and destruction of lives and property. These heart-breaking occurrences have been galvanized by the peak of mutual suspicions, distrust, segregation and ill-motivated incitement of religious adherents against those that do not share the communality of

their faith. In this section, we tried to x-ray the role that the use of provocative language and religious parlance of incitement had contributed to violent conflicts and those that have helped to dissuade conflicts. Quoting from the words of Arthur Koestler, *"Wars are not fought for territory, but for words. Man's deadliest weapon is language. He is susceptible to being hypnotized by slogans as he is to infectious diseases. And where there is an epidemic, the group mind takes over"*; and Abraham Joshua Heschel, *"Auschwitz was built not with stones, but words"*, Yael Stein and Elihu D Richter (3), submit that epidemiologic models of incitement and hate language as hazardous exposures (analogous to microbial or toxic exposures), increasing the risk of genocidal violence. Consequently, it is not uncommon to assume that populations with lifetime exposures beginning in early childhood to messages and motifs dehumanizing or demonizing other groups are more likely to engage in genocidal violence than populations not exposed. Thus, for instance, the cause-effect relationship between hate language and incitement and genocidal violence was initially recognized in the Nuremberg trials following WWII, whereby Julius Streicher, Editor-in-Chief of the anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*, was convicted of "incitement to genocide" and sentenced to death for committing crimes against humanity. He was guilty of propagating crude virulent anti-Semitic incitement, both prior to and during the Holocaust. Correspondingly, during the 1990s, the International Criminal Court in Rwanda convicted radio correspondents and journalists for inciting Hutus to murder Tutsis and opponents of the Hutu regime.

In a work edited by Krauthammer, September 2013, in resolving conflicts through practicing the principle of Non-Violence Communication (NVC), claims that Rosenberg believes most conflicts between individuals or groups arise from unclear communication concerning their needs. When people use language that provokes fear, shame or guilt in a conflict situation, the other person's attention is diverted. "Violent" language prevents people from seeing their feelings, needs and requests clearly. Thus in the center of confusion the conflict intensifies because that "violent part" causes counter-violence.

Sarah Van Gelder in an interview with Marshall Rosenberg (1998), came to the conclusion that language plays a vital role in aggravating violence or attenuating its effect. In the course of the interview, Rosenberg had observed with concern, for example, that:

*I was asked to work in a village in Nigeria where a quarter of the population had been killed in conflicts between Muslims and Christians that year. I'm in a room with the chiefs of both tribes; my friend had told me earlier there would be at least three people in that room who knew that somebody who killed their child was there with them... One of the key ingredients is to find out what their needs*

*are that aren't getting met. So I asked both sides, "What are your needs?" And a chief from one of the tribes looks at the other and says, "You people are murderers!" And the other side immediately jumps up and says, "You people have been trying to dominate us for years!" I believe that this analysis implying wrongness creates violence. In a case like this one, I try to hear how the person is behind their talk. I hear the need that's being expressed, and then I help the other side hear that. Then I keep that flow going back and forth. No matter how they communicate, I translate it into how they are and help each side connect compassionately at that level. Within about two hours, one of the chiefs said, "If we knew how to do this ourselves, we wouldn't have to kill each other."*

The edited work of Krauthammer further highlights the fact that Rosenberg's attempt at creating a peaceful atmosphere through the use of nonviolent language adopted the imagery of the two animals - the giraffe and the jackal. Consequently, The giraffe is the land animal with the biggest heart. With her long neck she has a good overview and clear vision. The giraffe stands for compassionate communication. The second animal is the jackal, representing competition. Jackal language is about judging, criticizing, analyzing, moralizing and accusing. When we feel unfairly treated, accused or when we want to impose our wishes, we tend to use the language of the jackal. Jackal language is separating. Giraffe language is unifying.

It is not uncommon to conclude with proponents of nonviolence that the language of violence is counter-productive while that of nonviolence builds a relationship of security and national progress. Thus, nonviolent communication is based on the idea that all human beings possess the capacity for compassion and only resort to violence or behavior that harms others when they don't recognize more effective strategies for meeting their needs. It follows without contradiction then that, according to Fullerton, Elaine /February 2009/ the process of communication designed to improve compassionate connection to others has also been interpreted as a spiritual practice, a set of values, a parenting technique, an educational method and a worldview. This principle is summed up in the very idea that most conflicts between individuals or groups arise, more or less, from miscommunication about their human needs, due to coercive or manipulative language that aims to induce fear, guilt, shame, etc. These "violent" modes of communication, when used during a conflict, divert the attention of the participants away from clarifying their needs, their feelings, their perceptions, and their requests, thus perpetuating the conflict.

The character and structure of the language of violence and nonviolence stand at the threshold of the truth concerning all restricted and unrestricted wants of the human persons, which invariably situate itself to either promote religious freedom and peaceful coexistence or destroy the role of religious freedom in protecting

national security, integration, spiritual transformation and prosperity aimed at fostering the common good. It is against this backdrop that we consider Jesus' approach and use of such language as (i) "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (*Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31*); (ii) "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you 'Do not resist an evil person'. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (*Matt. 6: 39*); (iii) "Judge not, that ye be not judged... first cast out the beam out of your own eye; and then shall you see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (*Matt. 7:1, 5*); "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust" (*Mat 5:43-45*), and many others, to be relevant and effective in sustaining the culture of liberation, nonviolence, security and the general wellbeing of any civilized society.

Other religious traditions have similar injunctions for their adherents to conform to, which include among others such statements as:

- i. And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, chose thou for thy neighbour that which thou choosest for thyself (**Baha'i Faith** – *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, 30).
- ii. This is the sum of duty; do nought to others which if done to thee would cause thee pain (**Hindu Faith** – *The Mahabharata*).
- iii. What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary (**Jewish Faith** – *The Talmud*).
- iv. Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others (**Zoroastrian Faith** – *Shayast-na-Shayast 13:29*).
- v. Hurt not others with that which pains yourself (**Buddhist Faith** – *Udana-Varga*).
- vi. No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself [**Muslim Faith** – *Hadith*] (Roche 160, 161).

Saint Paul had arrived at the conclusion that for freedom of conscience and peace to be exploited for the building of perfect relations among believers and non-believers alike, believers should as a matter of mutual respect for the worth and dignity of humanity within the context of the natural moral law:

"Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying,

(namely) "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:8-10 NAB).

To further support the teachings of Jesus for practical living, Paul further instructs the Christians of the Roman Church saying: "Who are you to pass judgment on someone else's servant? Before his own master he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Rom 14:4 NAB).

## CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

Religious differentiations and restive conflicts are as old as humanity in view of the myriad contending factors in human public life, personal convictions and character formation. The complexities surrounding religious intolerance have risen in view of the character development from childhood to adulthood whereby adherents of religious traditions are inevitably the products of the ethos and teachings of the cultures and societies from where they emerged. The facts of life though have come a long way to show that religious intolerance, coercion, discrimination and subsequent violence could never have the final order because these are hinged on egocentrically false beliefs and teachings of mortal beings that would not stand the test of time; for their persistence are just but ephemeral prodigies tied to matters of time. If there is religious violence arising from socio-political and cultural segregation, incitement and oppression, the tragic fate of such inhuman practice smacks of contradiction and is an irony of a truly moral life because it is self-evident that violence of any kind is opposed to the very tenets and fundamentals of every religious beliefs, practices and standard of living. If we are to agree with the teachings of the Bible that Christ who is our peace has through his vicarious sacrifice on the cross reconciled Jews and Gentiles (representing other religious traditions; cf. Eph. 2: 14-16), the individual Muslim who takes pride in reckless killings or forcing others to accept his faith under compulsion shall take full responsibility for his actions, not Islam as a religion since its tenets do not encourage intimidation, coercion or violence but stand for peace. Similarly, if any Christian takes vengeance to heart against an erring Muslim, he or she is not different from the culprit but must also account for his/her actions. The evidences are all before us, as both Christians and Muslims to make the decision to accept tolerance, fortitude and peace, or reject these and accept the culture of violence, religious discrimination, provocation and coercion, and ruin the threshold of national progress, security, prosperity and development. True people of religion who profess a faith and their religious traditions reflect their faith only when they honestly follow the teachings of their founders; to love not to hate; to speak well of others not to castigate; to support and give hope to others not to instigate by the choice of vile language; to forgive, not to seek vengeance; and to empathize, not to

condemn or dishonor. Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria have a choice to make in this regard.

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