

## Religious Principles for a Healing Response to Evil

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### ABSTRACT

*Since the rising wave of ethnic, political, economic and religious killings took a turn for the worse in 2018, there have been calls coming from Church leaders and members to Nigerian government led by President Muhammadu Buhari to stop the killings of innocence Nigerians. This paper argues that this is a signal that the Nigerian church has been malformed to the extent that she has lost a grasp of the fact that Nigerian government cannot stop the killings; only the church can. For one of the primary reasons Jesus came into the world is to kill, slaughter and annihilate the works or the plot of evil orchestrated by Satan and his demons against the human race. It is for this same reason that Jesus gave the disciples a mandate to go into the whole world proclaiming the good news that sets prisoners and captives of sin free. Also, it was for this same reason that he gave his body, the church, power and authority over all demons (Luke 9:1-2) to disarm, kill, slaughter and annihilate the works of Satan in any given society. Similarly, God has given Christians His Spirit to fill their hearts with God's love (Romans 5:5) so that they will voluntarily and delightfully have a passion for righteousness, love, justice, truth and intimacy. So, it is only Christians that can stop the killings in Nigeria, not Nigerian government. That is, it is only Christians that have the mandated to stop the evil plot devised by Satan against Nigerians, not government. They can do so by living daily and in every sphere for God's renown, joy, praise and glory; and also through pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and self-control. Thus in the pages that follow, I present case by case how this can be done.*

**Keywords:** church, government, religion, evil, human, Satan, love, truth, justice and intimacy

### INTRODUCTION

*Evil is a poison that intoxicates and kills*

### POPE FRANCIS

Evil is human lived experience. It is apparent that most people are living in social contexts of protracted wars and violent conflict (Armstrong 2014). For me, violence or evil has been part and parcel of my lived experiences. I was born in 1958, just two years before Nigeria got her independence from British exploitation and misruled in 1960. To some of us in the country, particularly in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, it was supposed to be doubled independence. We were ruled by both the British and the Hausa-Fulani whom the British used the policy of Indirect Rule to further hand us over to. This policy was necessitated by several factors. First, the policy helped the British to cut costs of administration. Second, the British could not conquer some of the tribal groups who were too hostile and resilient. For example, my own tribal group, the Sholio, were never and the Ogorok were never conquered by the Usman Dan Fodio's Jihad of 1804, nor by the British. Yet, through the other tribal groups whom the Dan Fodio jihadists had conquered and imposed emirs upon (for

instance, our neighbours the Atyp and the Bajju of Southern Kaduna), the British were able to indirectly rule us through the Muslim emirs.

I was nine years old when the Nigerian post-independence civil war broke out in 1967. Prior to that the loss of love, truth and justice had led to ongoing bloodshed across the Northern region of Nigeria. The civil war was the straw that broke the camel's back. My relations who were older than I joined the confederation army led by Col. Yakubu Gowon, a Middle-Belt Christian from the present Plateau State, against the Biafran army led by Col, Odumegwu Ojukwu.

Besides, I was brought up in a home where I watched my parents having quarrels that led to serious physical fights. Similarly, we live a neighbourhood where it was usual to find couples or the whole family entering into quarrels that led to physical brutality. I recalled a case of one of the neighbours who fought with another neighbour until he broke one of his teeth.

As I grew up and become an adult I have had to live with the memories of prolonged clashes

between Hausa-Fulani Muslims and Middle-Belt Christians, particularly in my own region of Southern Kaduna. In some of those episodes, I have had very close relatives, friends and colleagues gruesomely murdered. So, to me, like many people who are living with the traumatic experience of evil, evil is a lived experience.

My study of Christian theology, ethics and public policy have helped me to grasp the roots of evil and how Christians can bring a healing response to evil. One of the helpful insights is the realisation that the human God-given virtues of love, truth and justice are God's strategic plan for human security, stability and flourishing. They are the ideal and real concepts that are supposed to help a person, a family, a community, or a society to achieve social, political and religious order, security, stability, sustainability, progress and development. This is why the oldest and deadliest type of evil on earth was the attack on love, truth, and justice. In the Garden of Eden, Satan strategically attacked the pillars of human relationship, security, stability and development: love, truth and justice. Today humans use the same strategy to set whole families, communities, and nations ablaze. For instance, in a wide-ranging review of US foreign policy for the twenty-first century David Callahan writes that:

Ethnic conflict and quests for self-determination around the world are likely to be the most important factors . . . in the next decades . . . this phenomenon should not be seen as separate from other global problems such as terrorism, failed states, rivalry among the great powers, access to natural resources, and clashes between the modern and the traditional, or between the rich and the poor.”<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Dorothea Hilhorts (2013) noted how violence—domestic and conflict violence, natural disasters and wars, et cetera—have always occupied people's nightmares and lived experiences. She writes,

In our times, natural disasters appear to be on the increase. Although there are fewer conflicts than in previous decades, conflicts tend to be prolonged and often reoccur within years of achieving peace. Some of the plagues of yesteryears have virtually disappeared or have

become more manageable, but others crises have become more intense. Modern communications bring crises to everybody's home and they continue to be very much part of everybody's mindsets. Our times are also marked by the rapid development of international responses mechanisms. Humanitarian aid started its modern history in the nineteenth century, yet it has been evolving and restructuring considerably in the last twenty years. Peace building initiatives have become more robust since the end of the Cold War, and are increasingly framed in languages of human rights or human security. Disaster response has increasingly become proactive, with attention to disaster risk reduction mechanisms that aim to reduce people's vulnerability to nature hazards.”<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the conflicts continue unabated because love, truth and justice are being attacked. To lucidly grasp and unravel what the search for love, truth and justice entails, this section focuses on the narrative of Nigerian Christians' experiential history of evil—domestic, ethnic, political and religious violence. It is situated in the larger question of Nigeria's moral and ethical history. I appraise the *what* and *how* of Nigeria's experiences of the history of human hostility and propose steps Christian believers can follow to stay afloat in an utterly inhumane and corrupt society that steals, captures, robs, disgraces, kills and destroys not only human lives and properties, but human potentials to overcome sentiment and develop strategy that will give to Nigeria and Africa at large only the best. For like Paul Boateng once said, “Only the best is good enough for Africa”.

### DEFINITION OF EVIL AND WHAT IT MEANS TO RESPONSE TO EVIL

To adequately respond to evil requires grasping what it is all about. Since our concern in this chapter is about moral evil, suffice it to say evil is evil deeds or actions toward the human community— God, fellow humans and the environment. For the Moro'a people of Southern Kaduna, Nigeria, the word *Katuk nyio*, means evil deeds or actions towards self, other humans, including the ancestors and the living dead or towards the Supreme Being and all other supernatural beings. In this sense, therefore, evil

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<sup>1</sup> David Callahan, *US Foreign Policy for the Twenty-first Century*, 2002:02, cited in Anthony Oberschall, *Conflict and Peace Building in Divided Societies: Responses to Ethnic Violence*, (New York: Routledge, 2007)

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<sup>2</sup> Dorothea Hilhorts, ed., *Disaster, Conflict and Society: Everyday Politics of Crises Response*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1-16.

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is usually thought of as that which is morally wrong, sinful, or wicked. For instance, it is an evil deed to persecute a fellow human being. It is also an evil deed to attack innocent passers-by when responding to a raided attack on one's community.

Beyond the above moral understanding of evil as evil deed, the word *evil* can also refer to anything that causes harm, with or without the moral dimension. This can be seen in the way Scriptures uses it in both ways. On the one hand, evil refers to anything that contradicts the holy nature of God (Ps. 51:4). On the other hand, evil refers to any natural disaster, tragedy, or calamity that befalls the human society (1 Kings 17:20).

In his article on Evil, William C. Williams argues that, "As a prerequisite for any discussion of evil, moral evil must be distinguished from physical or natural evil." He uses the term "moral evil" to include both social offences (murder, theft) and cultic sins (those offences aimed directly against the deity blasphemy, idolatry). He asserted that, "Moral evil, therefore, whether its setting be cultic or social, when carried out may be considered a sin." Like the African world view that is wholistic, no separation of social from the cultic life, the Hebraic mind did not have the modern sacred-secular divide which is a Greco-Roman creation which got into Western civilisation and got catapulted to our own part of the world, through Western missionaries. Therefore, William argued, "That cultic and ethical values were one and the same in the Hebraic mind may be illustrated by the similar penalties exacted for the severest offences in either category (death, being cut off)."

The fact that there is an unacceptable behaviour known as evil means that there is its opposite which is moral good. The challenge, however, is who decides what is morally good? Is it the United Nations, or any other human organisation? No human being is the definer of what is evil or good, except God. Moral standards are God's revelation to humans. Accordingly, Williams states that what is morally good is not what human society decides is in its best interest, but what the revealed will of God declares. So, Williams argued, "There can be no biblical ethics that stand apart from cult nor a biblical morality apart from theology. Instead, morality is defined by theology, which carries within it certain cultic affirmations and prohibitions together with the ethical. For

example, the same Decalogue that declares that stealing and murder are wrong likewise forbids idolatry and blasphemy. What makes these things wrong is not some abstract quality called "the good" as sought by philosophers in time past. Instead, what constitutes social evil is what is so defined by God, and in that respect (i.e., as to why a given act is good or bad), differs little from cultic evil."

### Moral Evil and Sin Defined

The focus of this article is on moral evil. It is therefore, important to grasp its meaning vis-à-vis sin. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word *evil* as a) morally reprehensible, sinful, wicked; b) an evil impulse arising from actual or imputed bad character or conduct, say, a person of evil reputation. The Biblical account in both Testaments presents evil as sin, which is an act of offence against God by despising his persons and attributes such as, love, truth, justice, mercy, compassion, righteousness, holiness and so on.

Accordingly, moral evil finds its roots in disobedience, whether deliberate or accidental, premeditated or unpremeditated, cultic or ethical, to the revealed will of God, and as such, becomes associated with generic sin and virtually synonymous with wickedness. The stress in the Old Testament lies not on the conceptual, but in the practical outworking of a state of disharmony with God and one's fellow humans. It may be expected, therefore, that there will be an extensive overlap between terms for sin and terms expressing moral evil, whether the expression of this sin/evil be cultic or social. The origins for sin and evil in both Old and New Testaments are traced to the activities of an evil creature, Satan (1 John 3:8; "the devil has been sinning from the beginning") and to human sin that led to a fall (Romans 5:12-14) and banishment from Eden and the tree of life (Genesis 3).

Another helpful point that Williams made is the need to unravel the nuance of cultic and social evil. The main thrust of his argument then is that,

In biblical theology, natural revelation ties humanity in general to a responsibility before God which, when ignored, leads to human relationships that are immoral (Rom 1:18-25). In both Testaments, proper worship and social ethics are subsumed in a common covenant that ties the people of God to him and to one another. Since what God ordains is good, what

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is ethical is not clearly differentiated from what is cultic. Both belong to that aspect of sin that sets itself against the divinely instituted order, whether social or cultic, and thus inexorably finds itself in incessant conflict with God.<sup>3</sup>

Simply put, given that what is right was what was ordained by God, and what is wrong was what was proscribed by him, deviation from this paradigm constitutes what is evil.

Finally, Samuel Waje Kunhiyop explained that Africa never ask *why* evil but *who* causes evil, is the reason for evil existence in the human society. As it is, no human finds it easy to attribute evil to God, yet when the source of evil cannot be found, humans cannot help but attribute it to God. So, Williams in answering the question, "Why evil?" noted that we need to recognise that the Bible does not answer the oft-posed problem of how a just, omnipotent, and loving God could permit evil to exist in a universe he had created. Although Williams did not go into an in-depth discussion of this aspect of the question, he offered the following helpful suggestions about moral evil:

(1) While God is perfect, creation is only pronounced "very good" (Genesis 1:31); it is impossible for a created universe to rival God in perfection and the existence of moral evil is one example of its imperfection; (2) to compel all beings to act morally is to override their free will; likewise, to grant them free moral agency is to concede the possibility that someone at some time will act in an evil manner; and (3) God in his infinite wisdom created the best of all possible worlds; one can only consider that, were the world created any other way it would have been less than the best of all possibilities. The latter consideration also holds true as a possible explanation for natural evil.

In other words, all things are working to God's eternal wisdom. This leads to a need to understand the general biblical usage and concept of evil and violence in the Bible.

### AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON EVIL

As the foregoing discussion of evil has shown, there are slightly different ideas about evil. Africans, for example, have three ways of explaining evil. Traditionally, Africans never think of God as evil. God, the supreme and creator of humanity and the entire universe of visible and invisible realities, is good. Yet,

somebody must be the carrier of evil acts or responsible for causing bad things to happen to humans. This reasoning is what often lead to assigning evil to Satan, his angels, or human agents, such like witches and wizards; they are the bringers of evil.

M. A. Izibili draws our attention to four ways in which evil can be discerned from an African perspective. He noted how the African world view, which encompasses all aspects of lifestyle, the totality of their belief and thought systems, demonstrates that Africans see evil from three dimensions. First, *customary behaviour*: Izibili cited Wiredu (1983) who tells of how among the Akan people of Ghana there are some actions that are regarded as customary. Customary actions are justified on the basis that it is the custom of the people to perform such action. To this end, the fact that an action is customary and it has been done from time immemorial is enough reason for continuing to do it. Failure to continue to observe the custom is interpreted as evil or uncustomary.

Second, evil is seeing as *breaking a taboo*. The justification of taboos is always in terms of the adverse consequences that would follow if they were trespassed. If any forbidden act by taboo is performed, adverse consequences are believed to follow with certainty. For example, Izibili said that according to Agbeba (2004), the reason it is forbidden is, "The gods of fertility will be offended if sexual intercourse takes place on a farm land."

Third, evil is seen as *moral sin*. This refers of a set of moral standards prescribed by the gods, meant to be strictly observed to ensure social harmony and cohesion. For example, Placid Temples (1959) observed that in Bantu society, "Objective morality is entirely ontological, immanent and intrinsic." In this case both the moral standards and the action therein depend on this ontological grasp by the community or society. That is to say, Temples implies that the Bantu people sees doing virtuous or evil acts, not as an arbitrary creation of the gods or anybody, but instead as something demanded by the very nature of things; as natural law, so to speak. This ontological understanding of evil denotes that the performance of an evil act or its avoidance is chiefly derived not from the world beyond or from the gods. For in the Bantu idea of evil or good, it does not rely on power over and above man. Instead, it is based on philosophical and intellectual reasoning and not on religion, if there is such a separation.

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<sup>3</sup> Jusu, ed., *Africa Study Bible* notes

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Fourth, evil is relational (Oluwole 2000). That is to say, evil is always rooted in interpersonal relationships or “seen in the social context.” Human interpersonal relationships have choices and consequences. “This is why any violation of the moral order has a social aspect, which attracts serious social consequences. The society as whole, is affected, for every evil act is an anti-social act which has adverse effects on the community at large” (Izibili 2009:12).

The three ways of African understanding of evil underlined one common fact, evil is a serious matter. Behind all the three concepts lies the fact that evil is unacceptable because it is the enemy of humanity. In a society that tremendously values relationships, evil is a great enemy of the common good. Evil disrupts human harmony. It deprives humans of the potential of participating in the communal life of the society because pains and suffering can lead to death.

In short, moral evil manifests itself in social and interpersonal relationships characterised by love, truth, justice, and intimacy. Any of these behaviours perpetuate harm, pain and suffering and even in the good world that God has made. As it turns out, we lack a lot: “As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one’” (Romans 3:10). Moral evil is evil fundamentally done to others, and it can exist even when unaccompanied by external action. Murder is an evil action, but it has its start with the moral evil hatred in the heart (Matthew 5:21-22). Committing adultery is evil, but so is the moral evil of lust in the heart (Matthew 5:27-28).

Jesus said, “What comes out of a person is what defies them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, thefts, murder, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person” (Mark 7:20-23). Those who fall into evil behaviour usually start slowly. Paul shows the tragic progression into more and more evil in Romans 1. It starts with refusing to glorify God or give thanks to him (Romans 1:21), and it ends with God giving them over to a “depraved mind” and allowing them to be “filled with every kind of wickedness” (Romans 1:28-29).

Howley argues that moral evil arises from man’s sinful inclinations (James 1:13-15). Israel repeatedly “did evil” and suffered its consequences (Judges 2:11; 1 Kings 11:6; etc.). Behind all history is a spiritual conflict with evil powers (Eph 6:10-17; Rev 12:7-12), ‘the evil

one’ being the very embodiment of wickedness (Mt 5:37; 6:1; 13:19, 38, Jn 17:7-12).<sup>4</sup>

God is love, truth and justice (1 Corinthians 13, John 3:16; Hebrews 6:10; 1 John 4:8). The absence of love, truth and justice in a person is unlike God and therefore evil. And an absence of love, truth and justice manifests itself in unloving behaviour, peddling fake news and injustice. The same thing can be said concerning compassion, self-control, selflessness, empathy and patience, love of enemy or neighbour as oneself, et cetera. The lack of any of these qualities in the Christian life or community constitutes evil.

### Structural Evil

Walter Wink talks about the *inner* and the *outer* realities of human systems, institutions and structures. *The result of evil is that it defiles us, our social, cultural, political, religious, and economic, etc., institutions, systems and structures.* That is, it makes us unclean in the sight of God and unfit for his presence (Exodus 3:6). This, then, is the shame of our humanness.

Human evil is universal in its extent, self-centred in its nature, inward in its origin and defiling in its effect. This is not only the diagnosis of (arguably) the greatest ethical teacher in history, but it is also true to our own experience. Stott calls both the glory and the shame of our humanness the paradox of human history. He writes,

We are capable of both the loftiest nobility and the basest cruelty. We are able to behave at one moment like God, in whose image we were made, and in the next moment like the beasts, from whom we were meant to be forever distinct. We are able to think, choose, create, love and worship; but we are also able to hate, covet, fight and kill. Human beings are the inventors of hospitals of the care of the sick, of universities of the acquisition of wisdom, and of churches for the worship of God. But they have also invented torture chambers, concentration camps and nuclear arsenals. This is the paradox of our humanness. We are both noble and ignoble, both rational and irrational, both moral and immoral, both creative and destructive, both loving and selfish, both God-like and bestial. (Stott, *Why I am Christian*, 79.)

In sum, human beings are the product of both the Creation and the Fall. Evil thrives where Christians do not care to reflect on how to

<sup>4</sup> Howley, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd Edition, 349.

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respond. It thrives in the church today because, contrary to our assumption, evil is not just the bad and undesirable habits of a few people in the church or in our society. Evil is a reality that is in all of us. It is in you and in me; it is in our fellow men and women. By and large, evil is a reality that is found in the world of human beings and in the natural order (Agang, 2016:xii). The point here is, as God's servants whose relationship with God has been restored, we have a calling and a responsibility to resist, expose and reject evil in all its multifaceted nature (Agang 2016:xxi.). Thus, to respond to evil in Nigeria we must grasp what the extent of evil is in the country.

### EVIL IN NIGERIA

Nigeria's context of moral evil is our primary concern. We are not only concern about the *big* evils like the civil war, ethnic cleansing that is going on between the Fulani killer-herdsmen, Boko Haram and so on; instead we are also concerned about the *small* evils of fake news, rape, incest and all other forms of domestic violence. In short, the Nigerian social, political, economic or religious context is characterised by multiple decades of corruption, violent conflicts, kidnapping, domestic violence, terrorism and bloodbaths. For example, a 1991 report by the U. S. Federal Research Division to the Library of Congress listed some of the evils and pressure points that have come to bear on Nigeria in the last century:

[T]he imposition of colonial rule, independence, interethnic and interregional completion or even violence, military coups, a civil war, an oil boom that had government and individuals spending recklessly and often with corrupt intentions, droughts, and a debt crisis that led to a drastic recession and lowered standards of living. Under such circumstances, people tended to cleave to what they knew. That is to say, they adhered to regional loyalties, ethnicity, kin, and to patron-client relations that protected them in an unstable and insecure environment (Harmon, *Exploration of Africa*, 129.)

Most of the thousands or millions of the victims of the impact of such context of moral evil have continued to suffer in silence. As a country, we have not had a Justice and Reconciliation Commission, say, like South Africa, that offers people the opportunity to publicly express their pains and hurts and get relieved of their traumas. The Justice Obuta Commission which former President Obasanjo's administration established in 2000 was crushed by those who

did not want the victims of ethnic, political and religious wars, or domestic violence across the country to get a healing response to the evil that was meted against them and had to live with. So, Harmon cited Journalist Karl Maier who writes that in today's Nigeria, it seems that, "[E]verything is possible, yet nothing is possible." The country produces brilliant writers, musicians, athletes, and artists. It is also a land whose people race around to the ring waves of poverty, of dirt, of despair about the future of their children" (Harmon, *Exploration of Africa*, 129).

Evil has been Nigeria's lived experience. Out of the many examples that are well documented in the history books of Nigeria and the world, we can point to the Nigerian Civil War. It was known as the Nigerian-Biafra War. It was fought for a period of three years, with such bloody consequences in that at the end the death toll numbered more than one million people. The Nigerian Civil war which was fought barely after seven years of a celebrated-independence from British misruled, underscores what happens when a society loses faith in love, truth and justice: Broken relationships with God, fellow humans and the environment. For example, after independence from the British our selfish political and traditional leaders succeeded in pitting the masses against each other.

The Biafran War began with the secession of the southeastern region of the nation on May 30, 1967, when it declared itself the independent Republic of Biafra, was the acme of protracted evil deeds characterised by the politics of competition, suspicion, mistrust and hatred. For example, carved out of the west of Africa by Britain without regard for preexisting ethnic, cultural and linguistic divisions, Nigeria has often experienced an uncertain peace. Following decades of ethnic tension in colonial Nigeria, political instability reached a critical mass among independent Nigeria's three dominant ethnic groups: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the southwest, and Igbo in the southeast. On January 15, 1966, the Igbo launched a coup d'état under the command of Major-General Johnson Thomas Umunnakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi in an attempt to save the country from what Igbo leaders feared would be political disintegration. Shortly after the successful coup, widespread suspicion of Igbo domination was aroused in the north among the Hausa-Fulani Muslims, many of whom opposed independence from Britain. Similar suspicions

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of the Igbo junta grew in the Yoruba west, prompting a joint Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani counter-coup against the Igbo six months later. Counter-coup leader General Yakubu Gowon took punitive measures against the Igbo. Further anger over the murder of prominent Hausa politicians led to the massacre of scattered Igbo populations in northern Hausa-Fulani regions. This persecution triggered the move by Igbo separatists to form their own nation of Biafra the following year.

Today, Nigeria or even the entire continent of Africa is yearning for change. For besides the big conflicts, domestic violence, ethnic, political and religious persecution have continued to be a way of life in Nigeria. So, given this social, political, and economic contexts of the reality of a fallen, broken and decaying world, across centuries of our human history, it is hard to think that change is attainable.

Indeed, Nigeria's history of evil is replete with a narrative of the corruption of moral virtues and ethical values—love, truth and justice. To break the vicious cycle of violence we need to rediscover love, truth and justice. As it is, the many decades of living in the fields of blood have left us bereaved of love, truth and justice. As a result, we continue to see each other as enemies. We have even believed the lie or half truth that religion, ethnicity, or political parties are our major threat to peace. We have continued to herald fake news and continue to promote the work of Satan and his demncohorts, who come to us with weapon of twisted truths to steal, rob, capture, disgrace, kill and destroy us.

The communication media that other countries are using to bring development and transformation to their societies are largely being used by Nigerians to spread fake news. For instance, I read the following WhatsApp forwarded to me by a chat room friend on September 17, 2018. Here is the message: "How our father used our Elder Brother for sacrifice: a true confession by me, Chukwuma Osahor." He writes,

I grew up in a family of 5 children. Things were moving and keep moving well for us. None of us could explain why we had so much favour and wealth and all we needed. We never failed in school and we could not be involved in accidents. Something will just bring us out safely. Whatever was spoken over us also made us not affected by sickness. I knew it was not ordinary so I set out to personally know why. It is what I found I have decided to expose to the

whole world today without any fear. I found that we have an elder brother and my father sacrificed him for the family to progress. They used his blood to enter a covenant that nobody in the home should be poor or sick or die young (Blood money????). My findings again is that even though a stranger joins our family as long as he becomes a member of our family the covenant will work for him.

But why!! But it is for good. So I'm posting their identity so the world can know those behind this act. My Father (God, Loving Father) used our Elder Brother Jesus Christ, our 1st Born (Romans 8:29) as a sacrificial lamb

To save you

To heal you

To bless you

To join our family today, to say this,

Thank you Jesus for your sacrifice. I accept you are my Lord and Saviour and I believe you died and rose again to save, bless and heal me. Thank you for saving me. JESUS PAID IT ALL!

At face value this looks like a great evangelistic message. But in reality it is not. Half truth is not good enough. There are lies included in a message that is supposed to tell us the truth, and nothing but the truth. It is true that Jesus is our elder brother. It is also true that God gave him to be a sacrificial offering for our sins. It is indeed true that Jesus paid it all. However, it is not true that we are free from suffering, accidents, sickness and poverty because we believe in Jesus. Like a Berean Bible Church pastor noted in a Sunday sermon the loss of his member, Betty Sue Hill, "We have all had a painful week with the loss of our sister Betty Sue Hill. And it certainly breaks our hearts to see Glenn in such pain ... As Christians, we are blessed. Because of your faith in Christ, you know that your sins are forgiven ... But have you noticed that you are not blessed with having to never to through the same pain and difficulties that unbelievers face? Christians still deal with severe pain in this life. Christians have bad marriages. Have you ever gone through financial difficulties? Have you never lost a job? And there is still physical suffering. Christians get sick and have accidents just like everyone else." On the whole, the truth is that, "Becoming a Christian does not make you immune to cancer, or tornadoes, or financial failure, or the loss of one in death." This is a profound truth that we need in Nigeria's context because there are people out

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there who peddle fake news, half truths and so on. Like the Berean pastor points out,

We need to understand this truth that the pains of life are inevitable even for believers in Christ, because there are people who would have you believe that there is something wrong with you if you are a Christian who is experiencing great pains. And there are others who suggest that once you attain a certain level of spiritual maturity, pain will disappear. They claim that poor health and poverty and every other pain of life occurs because you do not have enough faith, and that God will continue to bring trials into your life until you straighten up your act and grow up spiritually. The fact is everyone will experience pain it does not matter who you are.<sup>5</sup>

One of the respondents (Mercy) to the WhatsApp message above, writes, “Oh my goodness, God is Great! I can’t wait to see him in throne!” This means that she accepted everything she read without carefully scrutinising it and verifying its authenticity. To help such naive minds, we need to grasp the source of evil.

### Source of Evil

Whenever evil strikes, Nigerians, like all Africans, generally do not ask, “Why?” but “Who?” caused the evil? There is a metaphysical cause of evil. Thus, it is important at this juncture to review the source of both personal and natural evils.

*The Fall* (this includes the discussion of human freedom that we have already treated above)Richard1!

According to Norman Shields, evil lives in us and outside us. The human mind is the factory where evil is manufactured. Therefore, responding to it will require us to take some of the crucial activities of our minds seriously so that in responding to evil we will not make the mistake of perpetuating evil (Shields, *Christian Ethics*, 7-9.)

According to the biblical account we have in Genesis, humans are moral beings. In other words, evil enters into the human race because a human being was created capable of choosing between good and evil and was given a clear

duty to reproduce his own species in ‘one-flesh’ marriages (Gen 1:27-28, 2:24). He had the right to use the fruit of the earth for food and a duty to rule over other living creatures. These instructions which have become known as “creation ordinances” show that from the beginning human beings were accountable to God for their behaviour. Adam and Eve soon discovered this when they disobeyed a divine command and found themselves called to account as a result (Gen 3). Their son Cain was held responsible for and punished for murdering his brother, Abel (Gen 4). The flood (Gen 6-8) is further testimony to the way in which from earliest times immoral behaviour brought divine retribution (Shields, *Christian Ethics*, 9.)

### Natural Freedom of Humans

The way in which Adam and Eve and their descendants were held accountable for their actions clearly implies that they had a considerable degree of moral freedom and could choose between good and evil. Without that freedom how could God or, indeed, a human judge blame them for sinful actions which were determined either by their own nature or by a force outside of their own personality? (Shields, *Christian Ethics*, 9.)The emphasis on a universal moral order is confirmed by the apostle Paul, who shows all men personally responsible before God—not one was righteous—all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10, 23).

Moral evil is rooted in our human freedom. That is, human beings are free moral agents. As such, evil is part and parcel of the daily choices we each make. For example, Kunhiyop has pointed out that Christians have correctly responded to corruption by consistently and diligently condemning bribery. However, he argued,

At the same time, the Christian tradition recognises that the corruption which manifests itself in bribery cannot be condemned in isolation. It is a reflection of the inherently corrupt state of the human heart (Jeremiah. 17:9). No amount of condemnation can change that. It is only God who can effect a complete transformation, which he does through the work of Jesus Christ. As 2 Cor. 5:17 states, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Thus the first step in fighting corruption effectively is to pray that God will transform hearts and to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 171).

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 11:32-40—The Purpose of Pain: Berean Bible Church, delivered on 03/22/2015, *Media* #750. Accessed at [http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcript/hebrews/heb-11\\_32-40\\_purpose-of-pain.html](http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcript/hebrews/heb-11_32-40_purpose-of-pain.html)

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Jesus himself spoke of this. Here is perhaps his most outspoken statement: ‘For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man “unclean”’ (Mark 7:21-23). Jesus here stresses our innate human capacity for evil. Stott has distilled four aspects of human evil that should engage our attention. In short, evil is in our human hearts and it is embedded in all human social structures.

### A VIGNETTE OF HUMAN RESPONSE TO THE EXPERIENCES OF EVIL

Humans live in a world of wonders; and a world where knowledge is extremely critical. One philosopher once defined the world that led the Greeks into philosophical discovery and the rest of humanity, i.e., Africa, into idolatry, as *the wonder of man and the desire of knowledge*. This world is the world of physical evil like hurricanes, wild winds, thunders, earthquakes, diseases, etc., which have been beyond human control. These physical evils expose humanity’s vulnerability and therefore elicit the desire for the knowledge of how to ward them off from harming us.

The point here is whenever physical or moral evil strikes, humans often respond in diverse ways. Our quest for knowledge of how to protect our nakedness like Adam and Eve did after the Fall propels us to look for way of escape. Thus, some human responses lead them back to God. Others lead them away from God; and still other responses lead humans into an inward journey—psychological (protracted trauma, depression, with dire consequences such as more violence or suicide) or philosophical and theological paths (humility or pride, unbelief or belief, theism or atheism, an outright rejection of God). This last group respond proudly to either physical or social evil and miss the whole opportunity of taking the chance to be free from the vicious cycle of social evil through going back to God in confession and repentance because what brought evil in the first place into our human race was sin, the disobedience of our human first parents, Adam and Eve. The idea of sin captures the broad spectrum of political, economic, and social foundations that were attacked—love, truth and justice—by the sin of our parents’ disobedience, resulting in what made the cosmos what it is today.

Proudly responding to either physical or social evil has led humanity to go astray from God.

For example, the Enlightenment thinkers responded to the Thirty Years Wars fought at the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation. Thinking that the Reformation was the cause of the bloody violent conflicts, the Enlightenment thinkers wholesomely rejected tradition, the Bible and all other forms of authority. Instead of faith in the divine and ultimate Creator of all the galaxies, humans placed faith in technology and science—reason, rationality and logic. Similarly, during both World War I and World War II, many people, such as the Jews that survived WW II, responded to the atrocities meted against innocent children by rejecting God and turning to nihilism and atheism.

In conflict affected societies across the global village, Some Christians often return back to their pre-Christian beliefs and practices to ward off the evil. They often employ the services of evil and supernatural powers to chase out their enemies. For instance, I heard a story of how in Southern Cameroon the so-called Christians are using demonic powers of their ancestors to attack and kill sophisticatedly armed military men and women. Those who do not go to that extreme, often go to the other extreme of peddling fake news and then using religion, ethnic differences or other forms of differentiations to perpetuate the polarisation of society and pitting one another against each other. Furthermore, some of them who have access to national treasury do take advantage of the period of agitation, fear, dismay, pains, suffering and mourning the dead to embezzle, capture, steal and rob siphon funds into their private accounts abroad. Others engage in other forms of violence. I was in South Africa in 2018. While there, I learned that many people are very angry at religion, particularly Christianity, which was used to promote the doctrine of apartheid, a system that was evil and destructive. In short, victims of evil and violence react in various ways. Empirical studies which psychologists and counsellors have carried out show some of the outstanding reactions across cultures to include the following:

- Self-blame and feelings of shame and guilt
- Fear, terror, and feeling unsafe
- Anger and rage
- Anger turned inward, depression, and suicidal feelings
- Substance abuse

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- Eating disorders
- Physical symptoms
- Self-harm
- Grief and loss
- Loss of control, powerlessness
- Changes in sexuality and intimacy

So, how does God wants his faithful believers to respond to evil? The point here is,

We usually experience violence as a private crisis. Many survivors feel isolated because of a lack of support, and because of the shame that surrounds sexuality and victimisation in our culture. Isolation is one of the tools used by child abusers and abusive intimate partners. This creates a difficult set of reactions that may be experienced by women who have been raped, battered, sexually harassed, abused as children, robbed violently, or hurt by other forms of violence. Such reactions are common to many people who have experienced trauma, including soldiers in wartime.<sup>6</sup>

Generally speaking, humans have had several ways of responding to evil and violence. First, philosophers over the centuries have wrestled with the problem of evil. In trying to respond to the challenge of evil, particularly violence,<sup>7</sup> in the world, some philosophers and theologians have concluded that evil is equal to God in power and authority.

We are familiar with the Augustinian formula:

- God is good
- God is powerful
- Evil is in the world.

This means that if it is true that God is good and powerful, the parallel existence of evil in the world raises doubts about A and B above. However, the argument limits the definition of evil to those situations, circumstances or acts which result in causing human suffering and pain.

Second, over the centuries, the Christian community has also thought through the issue of evil. In this context, theologians and ethicists

across have traditionally and historically responded in three primary ways or theories: pacifism, crusade and just war. *Pacifist theory* is rooted in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, particularly the two great love commands: loving God and our neighbour as ourselves. The *Just war* idea predates Christianity but it is basically rooted in the concept of natural law. In the 4th century, St. Augustine employed the concept to strengthen his claim that human beings are naturally violent; and the only way to stop them from this natural behaviour is to use coercion and even violence. However, in order that this use of violence is not out of proportion, Augustine proposed that it must only be exercised by a legitimate authority. The crusades followed the same line of thinking. For several centuries the church became sentimental; and therefore did not have an alternative view on how to respond to the evil of war or violent conflicts, except pacifism and just war theories. In the 1990s, however, Christian theologians and ethicists discovered and introduced another important theory in the discourse of how to respond to war and conflict violence: *Just Peacemaking*. This theory is rooted in the idea that God is a God of justice. So, in responding to evil we must be sure that both parties get justice and feel satisfied that their human dignity is honestly respected and protected.

This chapter respects the three current theories—pacifism, just war and just peacemaking—and argues that they should not be ignored by the Christian community today. Rather, they are to be embraced, in its search for ways—love, truth and justice—to dislodge evil in our society. To contextualise the three theories, I have included and unraveled the taproots of the problem of evil and how to respond to it. So, my proposition is that in order to respond to evil, we must recognise that it is not something that only exists outside humanity; rather, it is both embedded and ingrained inside as well as outside all of us.

Given our human limitations, some in their proud and violent response to evil have decided to have nothing to do with God; some have gone inside and silently lived with the painful and traumatic experience that the violence has inflicted in their lives; others have decided to violently respond to the perceived human source of the violence; still others have meekly and humbly recognised that violence does not solve the problem, instead non-violent engagement does with the reality of violence or evil does. It

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<sup>6</sup> "Emotional and Physical Reactions to Violence and Abuse" by Obos Violence & Abuse contributors, March 14, 2005. Accessed at <https://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/.../emotional-and-physical-reactions-to-violence-a...>

<sup>7</sup>

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is this last group that we have in mind in this chapter. That is, those who despite being overwhelmed by the reality of evil can still see hope for change because they have a deeper grasp of what evil entails and how to dislodge its effect on individuals, families and groups or nations. They understand that violence is a social phenomenon and that for an action to be considered violent, it needs a victim or a group of victims. They recognise that the interpersonal nature of violence seems to call for explanation or understandings that also are interpersonal. Therefore, rather than look inside the perpetrator for the causes of violence, social perspectives look in the social situation for factors that may explain why evil is universal but violence is not. It varies in frequency and intensity. The social question is not, "Why does violence occur?" but rather "Why does this naturally occurring, socially undesirable activity happen more in some circumstances than in others?" Thus, Blume (1996) is right, "Attention to the social aspects of violence can seem to excuse individual actions and, as a result, to encourage more violence."

Blume noted that people's individual experiences become social as they are shared. In Nigeria one of the reasons it has been difficult to broker peace, say, in Southern Kaduna is because of the shared narratives of past wrongs that the Hausa-Fulani meted against the ethnic groups of the region and none of their descendants has come out to apologise to the descendants of those who were ill-treated.

In this regard, Blume's functional analysis of social violence can help us as we think through what to do to rediscover the lost love, truth and justice in our region and across the country. To adequately respond to evil, violence, Blume tells of how social groups have a number of functional requisites; certain needs which must be met in order for a social group to survive. From a plethora of empirical research on the subject, Blume distilled the following to illustrate the approach.

### Social and Political Change

Families, communities, and nations often revolve in ways that benefit members and work to the disadvantage of others. Societies have created a variety of mechanisms including elections, courts, and mediation with the intent of facilitating change and eliminating injustice. But such mechanisms have their limitations. For example, courts create a need for either education or money to guarantee a fair hearing

of a grievance. Violence is often explained as the only alternative for individuals and groups who do not see a nonviolent way to break out of a position of disadvantage.

### Social Stability

Many of the mechanisms that serve the goal of social change have been created by a powerful elite with a goal of ensuring that change happens gradually and doesn't threaten their privileges. In this case, violence is seen as a natural response when a social hierarchy is threatened. For example, the elites and their political class often benefit in conflict situations created. The Dasukugate arms scandal is a case in point. Rtd Col. Sambo Dasuki served under the administration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. He was in charge of procuring arms to fight the terrorist group Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria. After Muhammadu Buhari took over from Jonathan, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) found Dasuki guilty of personally using \$2.1 billion which was the amount meant for the purchase of arms to fight terrorism in Nigeria.

### Socialisation

Children must be taught the expectations of their social group and must be helped to acquire the skills and understandings to take their place in the group. Violence may result when children and youths do not acquire necessary skills to handle interpersonal relationships, to manage their own lives, and to become economically self-sufficient. Effective socialisation requires more than just the presence of adults who can teach skills.

### Stress Management

Conflict theories suggest that conflict is a positive force in society and that human groups must handle conflicts in productive ways. He cited Sprey (194) who described the informal mechanism that traditional community and family structures offered for the management of conflict. For example, in the extended/multigenerational household any conflict between intimates could be mediated by others who were not as intensely involved. Neighbourhoods also offered ready access to concerned others who could assist with a family or other dispute. Lacking the support of concerned others, disputants may use violence in an attempt to achieve resolution.

*Control:* Social control is another essential function; a society needs to ensure that its

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members do not harm each other. Violence, from this perspectives, demonstrates failures in the control process.

Of all the foregoing responses to evil in society, Blume privileged the *functionalist contributions*: He argued functional analysis has identified many factors that may help to explain contemporary violence and responses to it. Many people consider violence to be a necessity that comes into play when the various mechanisms of society do not address social needs. High stress levels, rapid technological, social, and economic change, and conflict between social groups make sense as contributors to violence. These understandings of violence have the advantage of leading directly to action; if a society knows what is broken, it can organise attempts to fix it. On the other hand, a functionalist approach can point to so many possible areas that the result is essentially a “laundry list” of problems and proposed solutions. The theory does not explain how to set priorities or coordinate interventions.<sup>8</sup>

Blume’s analysis above is very helpful. But we need to dig deeper than the social perspectives he has given us above. That is, besides, social perspectives of a possible approach to human response to evil, we have other approaches that we could benefit from as we look for love, truth and justice, which are the best ways to dislodge violence in our society.

It is therefore necessary to realise that anyone who wants to respond to either perceived or real evil must first of all have a clear understanding of what that will entail. In the pages that follow we need to ask ourselves, “How does God wants us to respond to evil?”

God wants Christians to respond to evil in meekness. For Christ says, “The meek shall inherit the earth” (Matt 5). However, we must at this point clarify what do we have in mind by a Christian’s response to evil. First, by a “Christian’s response to evil” we are claiming that one of the primary reasons God saved and has given us power and authority is to use us as a conduit of his response to evil. Luke gives us this clue when he writes: “When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure

diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:1-2). We will recall that evil first originated from the heart of Satan and entered into the human race through Adam and Eve’s disobedience.

As contemporary disciples of Christ Jesus, we have been given not only power but also authority to drive out all demons and cure all diseases, A detailed exegesis of this passage is beyond the scope of the article. However, it illustrates the points that Christians are supposed to be bringers of Good News to situations of any kind of evil—from domestic violence to wars and violent conflicts. We are to do so by first of all engaging in self-criticism, self-confession, and self-repentance. God’s power and authority will only work through us if we are willing to make things right with God on our behalf of our community, society and nation. Nehemiah 9 provides an excellent illustration of what to do. The returned exiles recalled the evils that their ancestors, their children and grandchildren have rebelled to God’s revealed plan and purpose for them. Nehemiah and Ezra led the returned exiles to self-reflection, self-criticism, self-confession and self-repentance, and gave God reverence and worship. As we have noted when we examined violence in Nigeria, the present situation of violent conflicts are part and parcel of yesteryears events of human atrocities that have been perpetuated by our ancestors, our contemporaries and us. Students of violent conflict studies refer to this situation as multigenerational or intergenerational violent conflicts.<sup>9</sup>

Second, we are recognising the gravity of the task before us: evil often hides its true identity. When Satan tempted our first parents, Adam and Eve, he hid his identity. “Satan kept himself out of sight and used the serpent inducer, to sway Adam and Eve to disobey God” (Agang, *When Evil Strikes*, 17.)

Third, we are primarily focusing on moral evil and its consequences, which often result in social, economic, political, ethnic, and religious injustices.

Fourth, we must respond to evil because we live and work in a world of good and evil, right and

<sup>8</sup> Thomas W. Blume, “Social Perspective on Violence” *Michigan Family Review*, Vol. 02, Issue 1, Spring 1996, pp.9-23. Accessed online <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mfr.491.0002.102>

<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Piketty (1988), *Theories of Persistent Inequality and Intergenerational Mobility*, p.8-19. Accessed at <https://www.moodle.univ-lille2.fr/pluginfile.php/80654/mod.../Chap7%20HID%20Piketty.pdf>

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wrong. These are the two parts of life on this side of eternity. We must seek to respond to evil because we know that there is another side to evil: good. Evil is the worst enemy of the human race. However, evil does not have the last word—God has! To respond according to God's will we need to grasp God's revelation in the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments.

### GOD'S MODELS OF CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO EVIL

One of the main reasons for Christian interest in responding to evil is for the welfare of human beings and the natural world order. As such, we must know who a human being is. John Stott writes, "Until we have discovered ourselves we cannot easily discover anything else" (Stott, *Why I am a Christian*, 68).

#### Old Testament

There are narratives of evil and violence in Scriptures, particularly in the Old Testament. The most challenging aspect of a theological approach to violence is the presence and depiction of violence in the sacred, religious writings. In his article on "Violence", W. Vondey asserted draws his readers' attention to how the Biblical Scriptures, especially the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels of the New Testament, place particular importance on the image of God, the portrayal of creation and humanity, the perspective on religious rituals, and a warrior (Ex. 15:3).<sup>10</sup>

He noted how, on the other hand, God declares himself to be "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6). God "hates the lover of violence" (Ps. 11:5), and the fact that "the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11) precedes the account of the earth's destruction with the flood. Repeatedly, the biblical texts emphasise that the land and the cities of the earth are filled with violence (Eze. 7:23; 8:17; Has 2:8) and attribute violence to those who are evil and unfaithful (Prov. 10:11; 13:2; 24:1-2). God is described as the one who saves from the violence of the wicked (2 Sam 22:3, 49; Ps 18:48; 72:14; Jer. 15:21); the righteous pray for deliverance from their violent enemies (Ps. 27:12; 140:1, 4); and the final hope of Israel is the ultimate removal of all violence and the

<sup>10</sup> W. Vondey, "Violence" William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen, (eds), *Global Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 919-923.

establishment of the peaceful kingdom of God (Isaiah 11:6; 60:18; Ezek 34:25; Has 2:18).<sup>11</sup>

As the same time, the law in the New Testament has been summarised in the words, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Ex. 21:24; Deut. 19:21). The New Testament gives a violent account of Christ's suffering and crucifixion, and those who follow Christ continue to be persecuted, killed and slaughtered for the sake of God (Romans 8:36). Even the establishment of God's kingdom is framed in the context of war and violence (Rev. 18:21). The integration of these accounts in a comprehensive understanding of the biblical teaching on violence has proven to be difficult.<sup>12</sup>

In summary, W. Vondey argued that evil or violence is rooted in existential structures of fear whose acts eliminate the freedom of the individual and give rise to ambivalent and violent images of God. It is the result not simply of moral but of existential structures of evil that distort the image of God and transform human ideals into instruments of aggression by supporting a sacrificial mentality in which the individual surrenders to a substitute of God projected onto the image of the collective and its leaders. Vondey observed that in a spiral of violence, often set in grand scenarios of a cosmic war and fuelled by a cycle of aggression and repression, guilt, shame, and failed attempts of reconciliation, the collective is endowed with quasi-religious qualities that serve to create and sustain the use and justification of violence. This process is also held responsible for the death of Jesus, who bears the full extent of human violence that would otherwise be directed to other human beings. In so doing, the cross is interpreted fundamentally as the symbol of a nonviolent God who renounces violence by bearing its full consequences.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, to help Nigerian Christians grasp the truth about evil or violence, beyond the rhetoric of religion, ethnicity, and politics, I distilled the social

<sup>11</sup> W. Vondey, "Violence" William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen, (eds), *Global Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 919-923.

<sup>12</sup> W. Vondey, "Violence" William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen, (eds), *Global Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 919-923.

<sup>13</sup> W. Vondey, "Violence" William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen, (eds), *Global Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 919-923.

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perspectives of violence, which Thomas Blume has developed.

sphere of action. It presupposes the denial of evil, and it situates evil entirely within the sphere of history.<sup>14</sup>

God has responded to evil. God hates all forms of evil. Whenever God sees the evil of men and women He responds to it in wrath or judgment. God has this exclusive right to express His holy displeasure of evil through righteous wrath and judgment. We see this clearly stated in Scriptures. For example, Jeremiah writes,

For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Before your eyes and in your days I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in this place. ‘When you tell these people all this and they ask you, ‘Why has the LORD decreed such a great disaster against us? What wrong have we done? What sin have we committed against the LORD our God?’ Then say to them, ‘It is because your fathers forsook me,’ declares the LORD, ‘and followed other gods and served and worshipped them. They forsook me and did not keep my law. But you have behaved more wickedly than your fathers. See how each of you is following the stubbornness of his evil heart instead of obeying me’ (Jeremiah 16:9-13.)

Since the day our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God’s clear command not to eat from the fruit that was on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God has been in the business of responding to evil. When the world became so violent because every inclination of the human race was evil, we read how in Genesis 6, God responded to the violent actions and deeds of that generation by destroying the whole world, except Noah and his family. He responded to the evil of the Canaanites by causing the land to vomit them out of it. He responded to Israel’s evil of ignoring Him and serving other gods of the Canaanites by casting them out of the Promised Land and allowing them to be taken to Assyria and Babylon as captives.

### New Testament: Jesus and the Kingdom of God

Finally, God has responded to the sins of the human race by sending His only begotten Son to the cross. Evans states, “The ‘price’ God paid

was real enough. He died in agony. But he brought us back from ourselves. God’s action made it possible for people to be free to love Him by waking them up to the position they were in” (Evans, *The Problem of Evil; Redeeming Evil*, 8.) Today, the existence of Christianity as a wholesome faith is a colossal testimony to the claim that God has responded to the evil of the human race through judging His own begotten Son, Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 1, Paul tells of how God’s response to evil has resulted in the establishment of the Church. We (Christians) have been restored to a right relationship. Therefore, Christians cannot ignore the seriousness of evil in their lives which is capable of severing their relationship with God.

Thus, Jesus gives us transforming initiatives and principles that are radical and revolutionary. They are His way of responding to evil. For instance, forgiveness was a way of responding to evil. That is why Moltmann asserts,

The poor, the slaves and the prostitutes are no longer the passive objects of oppression and humiliation; they are now their own conscious subjects, with all the dignity of God’s first children. The gospel brings them neither beans nor rice, but it does bring them the assurance of their indestructible dignity in God’s sight. With this awareness, the poor, slaves and prostitutes can get up out of the dust and help themselves. They no longer adopt the system of values of their exploiters, according to which it is only the rich who are real persons, whereas all those who are not rich are ‘failures’ who ‘haven’t made it’ in life’s struggle. . . . The poor become God’s children in this world of violence and injustice (Moltmann, *The Way of Christ*, 101.)

It is helpful to recall, as John Stott tells us, the Bible has divided human history into epochs, which are marked by four major events. First, the *Creation*. It is absolutely foundational to the Christian faith (and therefore to the Christian mind) that in the beginning, when time began, God made the universe out of nothing. He went on to make the planet earth, its land and seas and all their creatures. Finally, as the climax of his creative activity, he made man, male and female, in his own image. The Godlikeness of humankind emerges as the story unfolds: Christians respond to evil because men and women are rational and moral beings (able to understand and respond to God’s commands), responsible beings (exercising dominion over nature), and social beings (with a capacity to

<sup>14</sup> O’Donovan “Evil as Moral Theology” Jean Yves Lacoste, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Christian Theology*, 523-524.

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love and be loved), and spiritual beings (finding their highest fulfilment in knowing and worshipping their Creator). Indeed, the Creator and his human creatures are depicted as walking and talking together in the garden. All this was the Godlikeness which gave Adam and Eve their unique worth and dignity (Stott, *Issues Facing Christianity Today*, 34.)

Next, the *Fall*. They listened to Satan's lies, instead of to God's truth. In consequence of their disobedience they were driven out of the garden. No greater tragedy has befallen human beings than this, that though made by God like God and for God, they now live without God. All our human alienation, disorientation and sense of meaninglessness stem ultimately from this. In addition, our relationships with each other have become skewed. Sexual equality was upset: "your husband... will rule over you" (Gen 3:16). Pain came to haunt the threshold of motherhood. Cain's jealous hatred of his brother erupted into murder. Even nature was put out of joint. The ground was cursed because of man, the cultivation of the soil became an uphill struggle, and creative work degenerated into drudgery. 'Original sin' means that our inherited human nature is now twisted with disastrous self-centredness. Evil is an ingrained, pervasive reality. Although our Godlikeness has not been destroyed, it has been seriously distorted. We no longer love God with all our being, but are hostile to him and under his just condemnation (Stott, *Issues Facing Christianity Today*, 34-35.)

We have the creation and the fall. However, with the incarnation we have redemption and the end. Thirdly, the *Redemption*. We respond to evil in imitation of our Creator. For, instead of abandoning or destroying his rebellious creatures, as they deserved, God planned to redeem them. No sooner had man sinned than God promised that the woman's seed would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15), which we recognize as the first prediction of the coming Saviour. God's redemptive purpose began to take clearer shape when he called Abraham and entered into a solemn covenant with him, promising to bless both him and through his posterity all the families of the earth—another promise which we know has been fulfilled in Christ and his worldwide community. God renewed his covenant, this time with Israel, at Mount Sinai, and kept promising through the prophets that there was more, much more, to come in the days of Messiah's Kingdom. With him the new age dawned, the Kingdom of God broke in, the end began. Now today, through the

death, resurrection and Spirit-gift of Jesus, God is fulfilling his promise of redemption and is remaking marred humankind, saving individuals and incorporating them into his new reconciled community (Stott, *Issues Facing Christianity Today*, 35.)

Fourth will come *theEnd*. For one day, when the good news of the Kingdom has been proclaimed throughout the whole world (Matthew 24:14), Jesus Christ will appear in great magnificence. He will raise the dead, judge the world, regenerate the universe and bring God's Kingdom to its perfection. From it all pain, decay, sin, sorrow and death will be banished, and in it God will be glorified forever. Meanwhile, we are living in between the "now" and the "then" of redemption, between the "already" and the "not yet" (Stott, *Issues Facing Christianity Today*, 36.) Stott's analysis above is very helpful. It gives us the basis for responding to evil in Nigeria and beyond. An overview of the Gospels will reveal Jesus' perspective on a Christian's response to evil. If you were to ask me what the Bible says about a Christian's response to evil, I will tell you it says: Be your brother's (or sister's) keeper; repay no evil with evil; do not resist an evil person, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, forgive those who persecute you and instead of vengeance pray for them; be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect, love your enemies, do not be overcome by evil, instead overcome evil by good and so on. This is a clear list of some of the things the Bible reveals about the mind of God for us today. Some theologians and ethicists see these teachings of Jesus and His apostles can help us when we are confronted by social, moral, economic, political, ethnic and religious evils.

To grasp what Jesus wants us to do, we must first of all realise the heart of what He is saying. Take for instance, "Turn the other cheek". Jesus ministered among the rural poor of His day. These were people who were always told that they have no hope. They were humiliated and denied all rights. By and large, their human dignity was distorted or eclipsed. When Jesus came into the scene, He gave them radical principles which will—nonviolently—give them their dignity back. Evans points out that,

"Jesus' redeeming work was a positive way of dealing with evil. He defeated evil simply by being good. The Key word is 'simply'. His will and the will of God were the same. He loved and served people as God does. He fulfilled the purpose for which human beings were created:

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to love God and to love one another” (Evans, *The Problem of Evil; Redeeming Evil*, 9.)

This gives contemporary Christians a clue of how to respond to certain evils perpetuated by those who have the power and authority to kill. The point here is, in our response to evil we are to be wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. We must remember this truth: “The transforming goodness of Jesus’ life would not have been effective if it had not been simple.” It is true that, “The transformation is complete. Good is triumphant. God has redeemed us from evil. But it still hurts. And we still have to die.” We still have to face the reality of our old sinful nature and a sinful world around us (Evans, *The Problem of Evil; Redeeming Evil*, 9.)

In spite of this reality, to respond to evil, we must pay attention to the following truth: *The Reign of God*. To rightly respond to evil, we must understand what the reign of God is all about. Jesus has taught us important principles that will help us in our quest to respond to evil. He said: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness . . .” What this means includes the fact that God wants us as Christians to stop pursuing what the world around us pursues. Instead, He wants us to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Although this is easier said than done, the reign of God in our lives make this pursuit possible (Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 21.)

Jesus’ earthly ministry provides evidence and demonstration of the arrival of the kingdom of God or the reign of God. The kingdom of God was inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus. To see Jesus’ manifesto, we need to read Isaiah 61:1-2a and Luke 4:18-20.

The following were further evidences in Jesus’ ministry and how it was meant to be a response to social and moral evil:

- Jesus’ *koinonia* (fellowship and service) “encompasses ‘tax collectors and sinners’ within its table fellowship” (Mark 2:15)
- That practice of including outcasts, “Totally ignoring the strictly drawn convention of religiosity, represented a theme of Jesus’ ministry which became an issue in society” (Chilton and McDonald, *Jesus and the Ethics*, 96 cited in Stassen and Gushee, 22.)
- Love to enemies as a strategy of the kingdom (Matt. 5:44-48) “is much more than a general expression of goodwill towards humanity.” [It] “presupposes a social context of the

faith-community encountering oppression, even persecution in society.”

## PAUL’S TEACHING

Jesus’ disciples grasped the mind of Christ on the matter of responding to evil nonviolently. For example, the fruit of the Holy Spirit is not just contrasted with the works of the flesh but also as an appropriate response to evil (Galatians 5:19-20, 21-23.) In the Epistles, Paul talks about ‘the law of Christ’ (1 Cor 9:21). What does he mean?

- It is not the Law of Moses. Nonetheless, it embraces and includes love for God and love for neighbours (Matt 22:37-40, Gal 5:13, 14), and for the environment. In this sense, love for God and neighbours and the environment is supposed to underpin and drive truth and justice in the global village.
- It is a new ethic appropriate to the new kingdom of God. God appoints Jesus to be sin for us. And Jesus has made us right with God, he has also made us pure and holy; he freed us from sin. Therefore, love, truth and justice are the virtues of (*the already but not yet*) new Kingdom of God.
- The law of Christ provides the Christian with a clear moral standard of himself. Christ’s law is love. It is a moral standard that is rooted in love, truth and justice.
- Therefore, love is the law given by Christ as king (Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 27-28.).
- It is the rule of God over his entire creation (Matt 5:43-48).

## APPLICATION TO NIGERIA: A NOBEL PATH TO A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO EVIL

The worst evil that can happen to the Nigerian society is to lose love, truth, justice and intimacy. So, it is important to retell the story of how we get to where we are today in Nigeria and in the whole global village. Lack of love, truth and justice has led Nigerian Christians to believing that the primary reason Christians are persecuted is because the Muslims want to implement an agenda of Islamising the entire country. This is not the whole truth. It is only a half truth. The real truth is, as the African concept of evil demonstrates, and the Biblical narrative confirms, evil manifests itself in broken relationships. Years of wars and violent conflicts and the consequences of traumas which have never been dealt with are hurting

our social relationships. We are being bewitched by our plethora atrocities and sins of unrepentant hearts. A lack of forgiveness and moving on is hurting us. We are being bombarded with WhatsApp fake news about the Muslims' hiring of mercenaries to attack all Christian communities across Nigeria so that they can successfully Islamise the country. There may be some element of truth in those WhatsApp messages making the rounds. However, most of those news claims are fake. They are unhealthy for our minds and bodies. They are in reality launching a frontal attack on our most important values—love, truth, and justice—which are the virtues that secure and stabilise creational relationships. That is why “Even in the church, the vigilante spirit is alive and well. Christians sometimes attempt to sanctify their anger calling it righteousness indignation, but we too are tempted to retaliate against those who mistreat us. Piously, we may tend to resist evil supposing that God is on our side as we seek to “even the score” by causing hurt or harm to those who have mistreated us. We may even try to use Romans 12:9 as a proof text for our revenge—as long as we read no further in Romans.”<sup>15</sup>

The biblical narrative recorded in Genesis tells us that when God created Adam and Eve, he created a community that was characterized by holy relationships in three dimensional entities: First, between God and two persons, second, between man and woman, and third, between the two persons and the environment. In eternal purpose and plan, such relationships were meant to be sustained and maintained by a simple rule of order and obedience. However, when the law is broken, relationships are broken. So, today, at the heart of every dispute, war, violent conflicts, witchcraft accusation and other forms of accusations is a broken relationship. In such a case, the transgression is not only punished, but reconciliation and restoration should be pursued aggressively. That proactive approach illustrates how God does it. For instance, when Adam and Eve sinned, they broke the relationship between themselves, their relationship with God, and their relationship with the environment. God punished them, but he also offered a process of reconciliation and restoration. It is through the

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<sup>15</sup> Loving Your Enemies: Overcoming Evil with Good (Romans 12:14-21). Accessed at <https://www.bible.org/seriespage/32-loving-your-enemies-overcoming-evil-with-good-romans-1214-21>.

death of Jesus Christ that God is reconciling the world to himself. To have genuine reconciliation with God, other fellow men and women, and the environment, we need to repent and daily cultivate our relationship with God, with one another and with the environment.<sup>16</sup>

In responding to evil, it will help a great deal to remember that we all have tendency to rebel against God's will, to be sinful. Christian theologians, ethicists and apologists have employed the term *Fall* to lucidly express human rebellion against God by the first humans and the painful consequences that followed (Genesis 3:1-24). God told Adam and Eve they could eat the fruits of every tree in the Garden of Eden except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But under the lure and deceit of the serpent, they rebelled against God and disobeyed. Since then, every human being is born in bondage to the sin of Adam and Eve (Romans 5:12). In short, Adam and Eve's disobedience to God was an act of violence against God's love, truth and justice. And every act of evil deed rehearses the process.

The impact of the consequences of human violence toward God's love, truth and justice is devastating. Humans went from perfect communion and fellowship with God to alienation from God. They went from original goodness to total depravity. Death became an unavoidable reality (Romans 5:12; 6:23). Before the Fall, humans related to each other, to God, and to the environment. The Fall ushered in conflict and hostility. Deadly and prolonged violent conflicts across Nigeria and other countries in the global village are the by-products of the Fall. Our marriages and families are broken, each with conflict and disagreements. Domestic violence characterised by wife or husband beating, excessive corporal punishment of minors or children, incests, rape, et cetera are a confirmation of the reality of evil. In fact, few if any relationships are free from selfish motives. Furthermore, humankind went from responsible dominion as God's stewards over creation (Genesis 1:25-31) to irresponsible domination and abuse of God's world. The point here is, since the Fall, all of God's beautiful creation has been broken and damaged. The Fall resulted in broken relationships between God and people, people and one another, and people and the environment. Outright rejection of God's commands, wars and interethnic clashes, and natural disasters—including hurricanes,

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<sup>16</sup> ASB p.8.

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wild winds, earthquakes, floods, landslides, erosions, droughts, famine, et cetera—are all a result of the three-way broken relationships between God, people, and the environment.

Satan's original tactic with Adam and Eve—twisting the truth—is still at work in Nigeria. For example, fake news has become good news today. The social media—FaceBook, instagram, chat rooms, WhatsApp, internet, Twitter, movies, mass media, and other electronic media—have become avenues of sharing and propagating fake news across the globe. People photoshop pictures of atrocities from other parts of the world to sell fake news about a similar local incident of attacks, thereby deny the rest of us the true picture of what has happened. Nigerians are consuming half-truths even from fellow Christians and leaders.

### CONCLUSIONS

We live and work in a world of good and evil, right and wrong. These are the two parts of life on this side of eternity. The need to learn a lesson from God's response to evil of human disobedience and broken relationships is critical. That is, knowledge of what God has done and is still doing can lead us to respond to evil in a manner that gives us healing instead of contributing to already bad situations of hurts, pains and sufferings. To respond to evil, only love, truth and justice are best enough. To do so, the church needs to change its mindset and begin to think more of how to solve the problems that the Nigerian people are facing. The church needs to strive for excellence.

God is the God of truth (Psalm 31:5); God is love (1 John 4:8); and God is justice (Hebrews 6:10). His Word is truth, life and way (John 14:6; 17:17). Therefore, we must seek to respond to evil because we know that there is another side to evil: good. Evil is the worst enemy of the human race. Unfortunately, this enemy is both within and outside us. For we are, like Stott says, "The product of creation and of the fall". As we are seeking to respond to evil, we need to recognise one fact—our lives are characterised by two paradoxes: We are "capable of tremendous good as well as at the same time capable of tremendous evil" (Stott, *Issues Facing Christianity Today*, 38.) Rather than giving up or becoming proud and dismissing the idea of God's existence or even become outrightly disobedient to God, Stott's explanation keeps us meek and humble. So, in our efforts toward ridding the world of its evil, we need to firmly grasp the reality of evil in us

and deal with it before we can help others to master theirs. Jesus says that if we truly want to remove the evil in others we must first deal with the one in our lives (Matt 7:1-5).

Finally, this quote from uncle John of blessed memory invite us into participation with God:

"How did Jesus expect His disciples to react under persecution? (In Matthew 5:12 He said), "Rejoice and be glad!" We are not to retaliate like an unbeliever, nor sulk like a child, nor lick our wounds in self-pity like a dog, nor just grin and bear it like a Stoic, still less pretend we enjoy it like a masochist. What then? We are to rejoice as a Christian should and even "leap for joy" (Lk. 6:23)."<sup>17</sup>

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### SUGGESTION FOR STUDY ON CHRISTIAN HEALING RESPONSE TO EVIL—GRIEF, DEATH, AND SUFFERING

- Agang, Sunday. No Cheeks to Turn?

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