

**CHRISTIAN MILITARY CHAPLAINS' ROLE AND THE GOSPEL OF NON-VIOLENCE
AND MUTUAL CO-EXISTENCE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY: AN
ETHICAL STUDY**

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Abstract

Contemporary Nigerian society is in its doldrums as regards the culture of violence and distrust among peoples from various ethnic groups that make-up this nation. To an extent, religio-political reasons are fueling this culture of violence and distrust. The thrust of this paper is that: Christian military chaplains are stakeholders as promoters of peace and mutual co-existence in Nigeria with regard to controlling the culture of violence and disunity. The core of this thesis remains Jesus' convictions concerning non-resistance to the evil one as documented in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5: 38-42, and His life as the Peace-BUILDER. Therefore, contemporary Nigerian context calls for Christian military chaplains to be more conscious that being messengers of peace and promoters of peaceful co-existence in our country, they have ethical responsibility to build bridges to harmony. Since Christ (God) is love, the chaplains should rediscover the poetics of testimony as a principle for building and reconstructing paths that lead to mutual co-existence in view of encouraging the reign of justice, unity, and peace in Nigeria.

Keywords: Christian military chaplains, culture of violence, Sermon on the Mount, gospel of non- resistance, and mutual co-existence

The contemporary Nigerian setting of intense socio-religious discourse with regard to insecurity and the culture of violence creates opportunity for Roman Catholic Military Chaplains to extend the hierocratic boundaries of their ministry to inter-religious engagements in view of healing the wounds of violence and divisions in our country. Military chaplains are non-combatant commissioned officers from the ranks of the Army, Navy, and Air force personnel who primarily serve the spiritual needs of those who belong to the armed forces and their families. The paradigm shift in the ministry of military chaplaincy, that is interreligious engagement recommended in this work, is aimed at exploring the chaplains' latent

leadership roles as community and religious leaders in interfaith dialogue and trust-building initiatives towards peaceful co-existence of Nigerians whose sense of brotherhood has been wounded by distrust, spate of killings and violence in the country. The foundational theory for this paper is grounded in the functions of (Christian) religion concerning the regulation of people's behavior and attitude to life and the influence of the society on religion. This work is divided into seven parts as follows: (i) introduction (ii) understanding the Contemporary Nigerian Context, (iii) Theoretical Framework: Functional Theory of Religion, (iv) Matthew 5:38-42: Scriptural Foundations for Non-Resistance to Evil and Mutual Co-existence, (v) the Theology and Ethics of Non-Violence and Mutual Co-existence, (vi) Chaplains as Peace-builders and their Challenges, (vii) Conclusion.

(I) Understanding the Contemporary Nigerian Context

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation implicitly defined by its constitution as a secular one. This is because its 1999 Constitution as amended forbids states and the Federal Government from adopting a state religion that subjugates every other religion to it, *de facto*, limiting the religious expression of other entities in the country.¹ The inability of the ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria to unite and collaborate together or see themselves as one, because of socio-economic or political reasons as well as weakened democratic institutions, casts doubt on sense of belongingness to this nation by its citizens. On another note, Nigeria understands itself as a secular state. According to Ogbu, contemporary understanding of secularity of the Nigerian nation does not mean that it has nothing to do with religion. It rather connotes government's neutrality over matters of religion and its ability to ensure freedom of religious liberty among its citizens so much that tensions and rivalry might be controlled.² There is no gainsaying that controlled tensions within a state contribute to its security and prosperity. Omatete is equally correct to observe that although all ethnic groups work towards foolproof security, no nation can be assured of full security at all times.³ Nevertheless, when the intelligence system, national power and will power of a nation cannot secure the life of its citizens, there is bound to be tensions among its inhabitants. The current herdsmen-cattle rustlers'

¹ *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* [Nigeria], Act No. 24, 5 May 1999, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/44e344fa4.html> [accessed 15 July 2018].

² Osita Ogbu, "Is Nigeria a Secular State? Law, Human Rights and Religion in Context," in *The Transnational Human Rights Review*, no. 1 (2014): 6.

³ Ogbemi Omatete, "The Security of the Nigerian Nation," in *Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood – An African Analysis of the Biafran Conflict*, ed. Joseph Okpaku, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972), 291.

crises and ranching proposal beg the question of peaceful co-existence and security. Furthermore, contemporary and neo-liberal dynamics of security seems to hinge upon conformity with rules of engagement defined by sovereign power and it is the responsibility of the sovereign state to enforce them in view of protecting the individual rights of its citizens.⁴ It seems Nigeria is overwhelmed by its security challenges because its statal institutions that ought to guarantee the safety of life and properties of Nigerians have failed. And the people have the constitutional rights to hold the government responsible for its inability to guarantee their security.

When intra-state violence spreads, the culture of insecurity extents its roots to the nooks and crannies of the society – the sacred and the mundane becomes loci of tragedy. Corollary, the culture of violence and insecurity is a socially constructed reality gestated by power play for specific purposes.⁵ The reasons for this could be ethnic, religious, political, economic, etc. This means that the culture of violence and insecurity in contemporary Nigerian context is socially constructed by agents who are empowered by specific narratives and instruments of destruction. In multi-religious context, when these narratives are coated with religious interests and ethnic agenda they produce sense of insecurity that threatens the unity of that social entity. Thus, as noncombatant religious leaders, Christian military chaplains in Nigeria have the ethical obligation of responding to this socio-religious condition armed with the gospel of non-violence.

Since it is the sovereign nation that primarily defines and addresses the sense of insecurity within its territory, its official rhetoric and concrete responses influence the perception of the people as regards this condition of precariousness since affects other dimensions of life. For this reason, Buzan aptly avers that the bottom-line of security is survival, nonetheless substantial range of concerns that have to do with existence are associated with it.⁶ These concerns include: wellbeing, happiness, prosperity, integral development and stable future. All these are threatened by the contemporary culture of violence in Nigeria. Can religion help Nigerians in ushering in an era of justice, peace, development and security in our nation?

⁴ Zeynep Gambetti and Marcial Godoy-Anativia, "(In)security: Coming to Terms with an Erratic Terrain," in *Rhetorics of Insecurity: Belonging and Violence in the Neoliberal Era*, ed. Zeynep Gambetti and Marcial Godoy-Anativia, (New York: University Press, 2013), 10-11.

⁵ Jutta Weldes et al, "Introduction," in *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger*, eds. Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson and Raymond Duval, (Minneapolis: University Press, 1999), 19. These reasons could be ethnic, religious, political, economic, etc.

⁶ Buzan, Barry, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-first Century," in *International Affairs*, no. 67:3 (1999), 432-33.

(iii) Theoretical Framework: Functional Theory of Religion

The society receives religion through its cultural garb. Precisely as a culturally mediated reality, religion is a symbolic referencing system that regulates the relationship between the sacred and mundane spheres of human existence. Because of this, “religions are increasingly viewed as cultural processes and artifact that are not disconnected from other dimensions of human cultural and social institutions, discourses and networks of power”.⁷ Owing to this fact, the connection between religion and society influences how human beings relate with other social entities. The changing patterns of religious cultures need phenomenological hermeneutics that social theories provide. Therefore, functional theory of religion “shades light on perspectival interpretation of human relationship with the sacred and how this relationship shapes one’s daily life”.⁸

The influence of religion on social institutions is premised upon the claim that it shapes the existence of human beings that operates them. Thus, the overarching argument of functional theory of religion is: “religions shape the values that ground the major institutions of societies and that, reciprocally, many practical circumstances in a society condition its religious life”.⁹ Given that the contemporary Nigerian context portends that the culture of violence is implicitly nurtured by socio-religious interests, religion has the capacity of changing the rhetorics of the discourse that promotes this *sitz in leben*. This reasoning consolidates the adequateness of Nigerian Christian military chaplains’ role in stemming the tide of violence with the gospel of non-violence as part of their rules for socio-religious engagement. But they can only do this by going beyond the traditional roles of military chaplains assigned to them in the community through assuming their office as religious leaders who are prepared to engage other religious faiths in dialogue and fruitful collaborations.

⁷ Sheila Davaney, “Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis,” in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, eds. Delwin Brown, Sheila Davaney and Kathryn Tanner, (Oxford: University Press, 2010), 8.

⁸ Emmanuel Duke, “Emerging Religions Marketplace in Nigeria: A Quest for Interpretation,” in *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, no. 11:4 (2014), 49-50.

⁹ Victor Lidz, “Functional Theory of Religion,” in *the New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Bryan Turner, (Malden, M.A.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 76.

The religions can control the menace of social problems. And insecurity is considered to be one of them because our value systems see it as a harmful condition that hampers the stability and progress of the society. Since social problem are products of deviant behaviors, the hierocratic domination of religion can change the status quo via strengthening of core religious values among Christians and Muslims for mutual co-existence of all Nigerians.¹⁰ The teaching of Jesus Christ on non-resistance to the evil one propelled by love for one's neighbor is an example of hierocratic influence of religion that can control the culture of violence in Nigeria. The next section of this work will treat the creative tensions in the doctrine of *lex talionis* and the Christian teachings on non-resistance to the evil-doers as regards religious violence.

(iv) **Matthew 5:38-42: Scriptural Foundations for Non-Resistance to Evil**

The entire Sermon on the Mount is almost an impossible imperative to human beings given that Jesus Christ gives it both as a command and counsel. This sermon contains many contentious instructions that render its pragmatics problematic; yet anyone who struggles to follow its counsel discovers relative mastery of the self and others thereby engendering harmony and peaceful co-existence.

You have heard as it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well, and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. (Matt. 5: 38-42)

The above biblical citation is one of pragmatically difficult imperatives in the Sermon on the Mount. It is an unconventional response to violence, injustice and evil one which stands out as 'revealed morality' and ethics of engagement given by Jesus Christ. The term 'revealed morality' is traced to the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Word of God, *Dei Verbum*," of the *Second Vatican Council* which holds that divine self-revelation is manifested through Christ's word and works.¹¹ Thus, in the pericope under consideration, Jesus communicates Himself as Pure Love and His life as the testimony that conquers the evil one as well as the antidote for all forms revenge that replicates the cycle of violence and hatred.

¹⁰ Emmanuel Duke, "Contemporary Limitations to Religious Solutions to Social Problems," in *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, no. 11:3(2014), 85-6.

¹¹ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct*, (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2009), 18-19.

And one of ways of replicating violence and hatred is the wrong understanding of tit-for-tat technically called *lex talionis*.

The concept of *lex talionis* is legal a framework that concerns retaliation based on the principle that justice demands equal or figurative retribution. It forms part of Babylonian, Persian, Roman and Greek ethical civilizations. In Kim's view, the Old Testament people had contacts with these cultures and were probably influenced by them. He opines that among the Israelis, the origin and context of *lex talionis* could be traced to Exodus 21: 22-25 and other Deuteronomic texts. Furthermore, in the agrarian and rural contexts of ancient Israel, where they knew each other well, *lex talionis* functioned figuratively to avoid unregulated revenge thereby supporting the victim's family with a symbolic compensation.¹² In addition, Weaver argues that the law of *lex talionis* gives the leaders of the community, that is, the judges rather than the victims or their families the power to interpret how the principle of proportional retributive justice should be implemented.¹³ On a related note, another author suggests that since Jesus Christ did not desire to change the immutable law – for example, an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth – that came from God, He attempted to rediscover its original intention which was misused in Israeli society.¹⁴ This might not necessarily be the case because Jesus Christ went beyond its original intent by giving a new meaning to it through the phraseology: '...now, I say this to you'!

In the same vein, the leitmotif of Matthew 5: 38-42 and its hermeneutical key are found in Matthew 5: 17-20 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them....' Curvillier gives an in-depth explanation of this justification below.

Matthew [5:17-20] is central, not only within the Sermon on the Mount, but more widely in the Gospel as a whole. It is, indeed, Jesus' very first declaration about the meaning of his coming...It is significant in that it concerns his relationship to the law and the prophets. The argumentation which is used must therefore be analysed very carefully....The beginning deserves attention. The very way in which the misunderstanding about Jesus' coming is formulated (τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας) shows that Matthew gives Jesus authority over the basis Jewish traditions: Jesus is

¹² Yung Kim, "Lex talionis in Exodus 21:22-25: Its Origin and Context," in *Journal of Hebrew Scripture*, no. 6:3 (2009), 3. See also, Hans Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3 – 7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 79.

¹³ Dorothy Weaver, "Transforming Nonresistance: From *Lex Talionis* to 'Do Not Resist the Evil One'," in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, ed. Willard Swartley, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 38.

¹⁴ Farid Hekmat, "The Origins and the Evolution of Lex Tallionis in the Abrahamic Faith," in *Journal of International Law*, no. I, (2010), 29.

superior to the law and the prophets, since his coming raises the issues of whether they are permanent or coming to an end. His coming provokes a new definition of current religious traditions and becomes the standard for re-evaluating them. In opposition to those who hold that his coming implies the abolishment of the law and the prophets (μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον) the Matthean Jesus actually repudiates this idea. He has not come to ‘abolish’ (καταλῦσαι), but to ‘fulfill’ (πληρῶσαι). The idea of fulfillment is typically Matthean¹⁵.

The superiority of Jesus Christ over the Law and the Prophets rests upon his divine authority as the Giver of the law and its fulfillment. Thus, the Christian version of non-violent resistance differs fundamentally from the Hindu religious tradition that groomed Gandhi because this reality is personified in Jesus Christ. The command concerning non-resistance to violence, injustice and evil-doers given by Jesus Christ becomes part of the evangelical counsels since all that He did and said are arguably pieces of advice rooted in the good news. Therefore, non-resistance approach to violent actions and persuasions proposed by Christ means that His followers must be different from the aggressors who are doers of evil.¹⁶ Yet, Christians should use legitimate means to resist them without seeking revenge through hate-filled retaliation.

Nevertheless, some Christians erroneously refer to Lukan sword language (cf. Lk.22:35-38) as Jesus’ unqualified concession to violence as self-defense. Concerning this, Okoronkwo gives a thorough exegesis of the Lukan pericope and arrived at the following conclusions: “It states clearly that the passage does not encourage any use of sword or any other means of violence for self-defense. It also agrees with the general outlook of Lukan narrative and Jesus’ non-violent ethics across the Gospels”.¹⁷ The disciples may not have understood the narrative of the sword or perceive it wrongly. So, when Peter used the sword against Malchus, the High Priest’s servant, Jesus rebuked him as follows: “Put your sword back in its sheath” (John 18: 11). Jesus Christ chided Peter because violence begets violence. The cycle of violence needs to be neutralized because as the saying goes: ‘an eye for an eye only leaves the whole world blind.’ Dear argues further that non-violence “breaks this cycle by refusing to respond in kind. It turns the myth of redemptive

¹⁵ Élian Cuvillier, “Torah Observance and Radicalization in the First Gospel. Matthew and First-Century Judaism: A Contribution to the Debate,” *New Testament Studies*, no. 55:12 (2009), 148.

¹⁶ Walter Wink, “Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus’ Third Way (Matt. 5:38-42 par.),” in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, ed. William Swartley, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 105.

¹⁷ Mike Okoronkwo, “Of What Use is the Sword for the Disciple of Jesus? A Discourse Analysis of Lk. 22: 35-38 in the Light of the New Testament Ethics of Non-violence,” in *Scriptura: Journal of Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa*, no. 113: 1, (2014), 15.

violence upside down and opens up the way to reconciliation and justice through forgiveness, love and resistance to evil”.¹⁸

What is more, when Jesus was manhandled by the Pilate’s steward, He did not keep silent before such wrong doing but asked: “...if I have said anything wrong, tell me what it was. But if I have told the truth, why do you hit me” (Jn. 18: 23). Jesus’ non-resistance ethics does not mean keeping quiet before evil-doers or injustices. It is intimately linked to truth and that is why Jesus asked the Pilate’s steward that question. Truly, when humanity is opened to truth about God, itself and religion; the meaning and logic of non-violence will be appreciated the more. M. Ghandi and M. King Jnr. deeply appreciated this teaching. Therefore, the dialogue to be initiated with the violent ‘other’ or the aggressor is aimed at the truth concerning human existence and this journey sometimes leads to peace and mutual co-existence. Even though this might not bear fruit immediately; it might even fail some of the times. Despite all these, it will ultimately lead humanity to rediscover God who is the source of peace. This leads us to the theology and spirituality of non-violence and mutual co-existence.

(v.) The Theology and Ethics of Non-Violence and Mutual Co-existence

Christian theology rests heavily upon the life, words and deeds of Jesus Christ. His social agenda informs the theology of non-violence and its ethics. In Christ the full revelation of God as peace is given. This is done definitively in Jesus Christ who redeems the world of violence through non-violent witnessing to love, truth and justice. Given that balanced Christian theology implicates the entire economy of salvation, the theology and ethics of non-violence and mutual existence is essentially Trinitarian and ultimately Christological.

The Trinitarian understanding of non-violence gospel is rooted in the appreciation of the Trinity as similarities (One nature) - in-difference (three Persons) as re-echoed by Sigurdson.¹⁹ This can animate the discourse on non-violence a great deal. Often the culture of violence begins and thrives with antagonistic differentiation and naming of the other as this or that for whatsoever reason. Since the Trinitarian essence is love, the difference in the Persons does not give any room for antagonistic

¹⁸ Dear, John, *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Non-violence*, (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 1994), 20.

¹⁹ Ola Sigurdson, “Is the Trinity a Practical Doctrine?,” in *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*, eds. Werner Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 119.

differentiation. Rather it strengthens relational difference among them which informs the concordance in their mission *ad extra*. Analogically, the strength and praxis of relational difference can help all believers, especially those of the Abrahamic faiths, to shield their swords and embrace the culture of non-violence and mutual trust.

The Christological foundation for the theology of non-violent resistance to the evil one is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ and demonstratively so in His kingdom message. He stood for non-violence from the beginning to the end and the ultimate moments of this life evinced this. Weaver corroborates this argument in the following lines: “A statement at his trial demonstrates that his rejection of military uprising was a principled action. He told Pilate, ‘My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews’”²⁰ This line of thought supports Jesus’s prohibition of the use of the sword by Peter in John 18:11 since violent actions of humanity cannot truly mirror the presence of God’s kingdom nor promote it. Mutual co-existence is one of the fruits of non-violent disposition to ‘the other’ when dysfunctional character of belligerency has been unmasked and tamed. It is not the case that relationship will be rebuilt easily again; but it is also true that a lot of sacrifices must be made so that equitable justice might be enjoined by all. From all that has been discussed so far, there is no gainsaying that mutual-coexistence is always work in progress.

Christian understanding of the ethics of non-violent resistance and mutual co-existence are lived expressions of the believer’s commitment to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Persons can deduce different interpretations from the life and sayings of Jesus: pacifists or non-violent response to the culture of violence. Olson indicates that pacifism advocates, based on strong religious and/or moral principles, an absolute non-resistance to violence and conflict. However, this does not square with Christian realism of a world of violence that must be confronted.²¹ A lot has changed in Roman Catholic Just-War Theory: contemporary popes - John Paul II, Benedict V XI and Francis – stand for non-violent approach and spirituality. But this does not mean that the actions of evil persons must not be named or condemned. In the contemporary context where the culture of violence is gaining grounds, Christian military chaplains

²⁰ Dorothy Weaver, “A Jesus-Centered Peace Theology, or, Why and How Theology and Ethics are Two Sides of the One Profession of Faith,” in *The Conrad Grebel Review*, no. 34: 1 (2016), 11.

²¹ Carl Olson, *Religious Studies: The Key Concepts*, (London: Routledge, 2011), 168-9.

in Nigeria are called to engage pastorally with leaders of other religions – especially Islam – for the promotion of peace and mutual co-existence in our country.

(vi.) Military Chaplains: Peace-builders and Difficulties therein

The chaplain is a non-combatant commissioned military officer primarily concerned with the spiritual life of those in military service and their families. In this service of bringing God to the people and vice versa, the chaplain is a person of two loyalties: the ecclesiastical authority and the military order.²² As ministers of Christ, military chaplains are men of peace during the time of war and seasons of relative peace. Their vocation and profession consolidate this identity as those who make serious contributions to peace in the society. For this reason, Moore explains that though military chaplains are from specified faith groups, the military hierarchy expects them to be of help to people from all religious persuasions.²³

As agents of peace, Nigerian Christians who serve as military chaplains have to take up roles that go beyond what traditional chaplaincy demands. In their new roles as builders of peace, they will: (i) serve as religious liaison officer; (ii) create interface with other local religious leaders; (iii) develop the contents of interfaith dialogue, (iv) build relationships in the community; (v) promote goodwill in the local community; (vi) establish formal interfaith dialogue committee where there is none; and (vii) encourage collaboration on socio-religious matters within the community.²⁴ In view of taking up these new roles as peace-builders, Nigerian Military chaplains must be inter-religious or nothing else! The guidance for this engagement is basically found in *Nostra Aetate* (Nos. 2 and 3).²⁵ As Tracy submits, this means that:

...dialogue and solidarity amidst differences and conflicts which dialogue may demand is our best hope. There is no escape from the insight which modernity most feared: there

²² Jacqueline Whitt, *Bringing God to Men: American Military Chaplains and the Vietnam War*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University Press, 2014), 1.

²³ Steve Moore, *Military Chaplains as Agents of Peace: Religious Leaders Engagement in Conflict and Post-Conflict Environment*, (Lanham, ML: Lexington Books, 2013), 6.

²⁴ William Lee, Christopher Burke and Zonna Crayne, *Military Chaplains as Peace Builders: Enhancing Indigenous Religious in Stability Operations*. Scotts, (Scotts Valley, C.A.: (Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), vii.

²⁵ The guidance for this engagement is basically found in *Nostra Aetate*. Cfr. Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Nostra Aetate*” in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Council: From Trent to Vatican II*, eds. Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo, Vol. II, (London: Sheed and Ward/Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), nos. 2 and 3.

is no innocent tradition (including modernity), no innocent classic (including the scriptures) and no innocent reading (including this one). My hope is in genuinely dialogical thought accompanied by real solidarity in action.²⁶

By the same token, Hinze reminds us that: dialogue between Christians and the ‘other’ that belongs to other living faith remains the most difficult, challenging and important frontier in extra-ecclesial dialogue. This is because of difference in religious traditions, personal identities, etc., that mark believers from two different religious traditions or more.²⁷ Inter-religious dialogue with the religious ‘other’ presupposes ecumenical interactions with Protestant military chaplains through which Nigerian Christians serving as military chaplains should learn the path of accepting difference and being tolerant with regard to beliefs in the same Christ.

For Christian military chaplains to function effectively in these expanded frontiers as peace-builders and promoters of mutual co-existence in Nigeria; there is need for them to have a specialized and ongoing formation on inter-religious engagements. The chaplains have already had adequate doctrinal formation as priests. Therefore, this training in inter-religious engagement will empower Christian military chaplains a great deal as regards facing the challenges involved in this mission *ad extra ecclesiam*. Before the inter-religious training commences, it is pertinent to note that as chaplains should not underestimate the potentialities of the ministry of the word. This is because preaching “at its best, however, engages what can be called the threefold dialogical dimensions of the homily: the dialogue with everyday life, the dialogue of scripture, and the dialogue of the liturgy”.²⁸ Within the contemporary Nigerian context, this three-fold dialogue must be verbally non-violent. As military chaplains and ministers of peace, these military officers must not incite the Christian faithful (military or civilian) with belligerently intoxicated sermons concerning herdsmen-cattle rustlers’ related killings and other contentious issues in the society. Nevertheless, using Jesus’s social agenda as expressed in the gospel of non-violence, chaplains are to prepare the faithful for social engagement with the religious ‘other’ in their communities.

²⁶ Davis Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: Inter-religious Dialogue*, (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990), 5-6.

²⁷ Bradford Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments*, (New York (NY): Continuum, 2006), 208.

²⁸ Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue*, 21.

In the course of exploring these new frontiers as messengers of peace, Nigerian Christian military chaplains are bound to face some bottlenecks. First, on a personal level, dissonance of life as regards conformity with Christ hampers this new frontier of the chaplaincy. As a result, there is need for continuous conversion of the chaplains towards having the mind of Christ. This is fundamental and *conditio sine qua non* for taking up the role of peace-makers *ad extra ecclesiam*. Given that inter-religious engagement cannot be reduced social activities, continuous conversion and openness to the Spirit of God will make the chaplains' hearts ready for dialogue. In concrete terms, gestures of attending religious functions organized by the Muslim clerics and inviting them also to religious functions in the Christian churches can go a long way to diffusing the negative energy of suspicion among military chaplains. Second, before this new religious engagement is kick-started, the Directors of Christian military chaplain services being the servant of two masters – military and ecclesiastical – have to discuss this dialogical strategy with their superiors as well as its benefits for the military service and the country at large especially with regard to mutual co-existence. It may take some time for ecclesiastical and military authorities to accept this proposal, thus patience and tolerance should be cultivated by those concerned. Third, while waiting for the authorities to approve the proposal for inter-religious engagements, Christian military chaplains may not have it easy with regard to socio-economic collaborations with those from the Muslim community because of religious distrust built in the past, difference in religious backgrounds, cultural differences, etc. With genuine love, patience, sincerity of intentions, and desire for peace the barriers will be gradually surmounted.

vii) Conclusion

Rather than arriving at a conclusion as regards this paper's submission on the roles of Christian military chaplains as builders of bridges to peace in Nigerian contemporary context, it pertinent to recommend a turn to the poetics of testimony as ancillary principle of engagement for Christian military chaplains as carriers of the gospel of peace. Chopp describes the poetics of testimony as follows:

This genre that I am naming provides a strong critique of dominant cultural practices that provokes refigurations of the social imaginary, that is, the basic presuppositions, metaphors, and rules that frame cultural operations. The poetics of testimony challenges how the real is both represented and created in culture summoning us to question the role of modern theory as the court of the real (2001, p. 57).

Christian military chaplains need to engage with contemporary cultural practices that encourage violence along tribal and religious lines. They have to; first of all, kill these practices in their bodies as concretization of the poetics of testimony. As co-workers with Christ, Christian military chaplains have the testimony of the Son of God as their rule of engagement. With this, these ministers of God are to resist the evil one in all ramifications and as carriers of the gospel they should promote peace and mutual co-existence in the community. Finally, their commitment to the God of Jesus Christ is very crucial to seeing things differently as non-combatant commissioned officers. They should always remember that their field of engagement is not only the dimension of Christian spiritual life, but the tempest of contemporary culture of violence fuelled by religious intolerance and dysfunctional democratic governance. This socio-religious context and the poetics of witnessing calls on Christian military chaplains to be truly *lux in tenebris!*

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