

Healing Social Violence:
Practical Theology and the Dialogue of Life for Taraba State, Nigeria

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May 24, 2016

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Doctor of Philosophy in Practical

Theology

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Abstract

This work advances a practical theology of relationships that attends to the narratives, struggles and needs of Christians caught in ethnic and religious violence in Taraba, a north eastern state in Nigeria. The study re-vision dialogue, in particular the 'dialogue of life' which leads to fostering inter-community relations, advancing lasting peace in Nigeria, Africa and beyond. This work utilizes the praxis method that is interpretive and dialogical. It builds on John Baptist Metz's categorical Method, and incorporates the praxis aspects of the Cardijn method (see, judge and act). The purpose of the praxis is to transform difficult pastoral situations into life flourishing situations. The study seeks to motivate a re-examination of the design and governance of conflicting communities and contribute towards developing an inclusive, interreligious and ecumenical ecclesiology. The research describes the reality of social context in order to discern conflicting cultural and religious understandings that inform the use of social medium for dialogue. Granted there are challenges of social violence across contemporary Nigeria, and the the impact of ethnic and religious crises that have led to so many ruptures in Nigeria, in particular Taraba State the church can be an effective instrument in rebuilding these relationships and fostering reconciliation.

As dialogical research, this study adopts a method of practical theological reflection that builds on three categories of Metz's method that explores the "judging" portion of the work in order to engage both African tradition and Catholic theological wisdom. In this way, a deeper consideration of the impact of violence both interpersonal and structural is brought forth. Notably, evidence from contemporary social science in terms of analysis of the peoples involved in Taraba State and similar conflicts show that

the social psychological dimension of violence is long term stress that ultimately destroys both personal and social relationships. Knowing that identity and social experiences are shaped by relationships Christians are called to understand their interpersonal social relationships in the light of scripture and tradition. God's self-revelation can only be in relationship since God reveals God self as a Trinitarian community of persons. This is well expressed in the experience of the Eucharist which further reveals a profound sense of relationship where divine narrative intersects with human narrative.

Finally, this study explores narratives as another critical category in the theological reflection on violence in Nigeria and the “dialogue of life” as a Catholic response. The study examines the African understanding of community, which itself builds on narratives and relationships. Ultimately, the understanding of community also shapes everyday ecclesiology. When these categories are therefore, taken together, they confirm the value of connecting magisterial teaching regarding a “dialogue of life,” developed in the context of interreligious dialogue, with magisterial social teaching.

The strength of this work is in its major contribution to method which builds on Metz’s categorical method utilized here in relationships, narratives, community and the dialogue of life. It is hoped that the work brings reconciliation in Taraba State, and leads to healing among warring communities both within and without Nigeria. The journey begins with the daily Christian practices of community living surmised here as the ‘dialogue of life.’

Acknowledgements

At the completion of this work I would like to thank numerous people who have offered support and guidance along the way. To Dr. Daniel Ude Asue, who encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies and Dr. Clement Terseer Iorliam, who graciously supported me along the way, I offer my sincere gratitude. For the dissertation, my thanks go to my committee members: Dr. Bryan Froehle, my advisor and chair, for believing in my work and always offering unconditional help, for the many hours he has dedicated to review and guide my work, paying careful attention to my writing; Dr. Joe Holland, who introduced me through his writings to a theological understanding of healing social violence and with his wisdom helped me focus and deepen my work; Dr. Ondina Cortes, who opened the door to understanding the suffering of those caught in interreligious violence through the lens of trauma and offered valuable ideas to improve my work.

This work is the result of a four-year journey in which I have been blessed to be part of the School of Theology and Ministry at St. Thomas University. I acknowledge with gratitude the School's faculty and staff for the support and mentorship received: Dr. Mary Carter Waren, Dr. Theodore Whapham, Dr. Beth Stovell, Cynthia Rose, and Cary Trujillo. I also want to thank my fellow students who were companions in the journey through the Ph.D. in Practical Theology at St. Thomas University, Miami, Florida. I am thankful for their friendship, insights, and feedbacks. Thanks to Dr. Richmond Dzekwoe, Dr. Anthony Adewu, Ricardo Gongzeles, and Stout Swanson Trish. I also thank Dr. Jonathan Best for editing my final work with such dedication. My gratitude also goes to the members of the Holy Family Parish, Maimi, Florida, St. Joseph Parish and the

clusters of St. Stephen Central City, St. Patricks Anamosa, St. John Caggon and St. Joseph Perieburg in Iowa. The pastoral staff of Mercy Medical Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Immaculate Conception Parish and St. Wenceslaus Parish, Cedar Rapids, Iowa for their friendship and encouragement.

My brother priests too supported me in significant ways. Daniel Melaba, Cosmas Jooli, Michael Jaki, Simon Ikpum, Simeon Iber, Gabriel Wankar, Godwin Bagu, and many others too numerous to mention. I also acknowledge the support I received from Sisters Philomena Agba, Patience Payne, Emilia Wreh, Amelia Wallace and Doosuur Hembe. In the course of study, the Archdiocese of Miami under the jurisdictional authority of Archbishop Thomas Wenski offered me the opportunity to minister to the Catholic community of Holy Family Catholic Church, Miami, Florida where I resided for two years. The Pastor, Rev Franky Jean was more of a brother to me. He made life very comfortable. The parishioners were kind, loving and generous. These include the families of Desir, Matthew and Ginnette, Jose and Andrea, Elizabeth Semeah, Maria Valencia and Michael, Jose and Amanda, Fernando and Dadiana, Ferer Chapenteur, Ulrick Michel, Gerard and Altagrace Baker, Mark Baker, Djénie Prato, Fabiola Joseph, Bernard and Margaret D'Costa, and the Laroach family. Individuals too were very helpful to me. Dr Josee Gregor read the manuscript and made useful comments. Others such as Camerlita, Mytho, Margaret Baura, Lona, Alix Sylien, Alicia, Tony Abiera, Walter, Lucien, Jesus, Werbert, and Guyaude supported me at different times. Other friends such as Thomas and Joy Calhoun, Jude Yange and Mirlande were also very supportive. The Vision of Christ Prayer Group provided spiritual nourishment. The families of Deacon Valentine and Philo Onuigbo, Richard and Justina Mendy, Brother and Sister Regina Odiwo, Merci and

Henrieta, Vincent and Debbie Edward were simply wonderful. Thank you all for being inspirational and supportive. Similarly, Frs. David O' Connor, Chris Podersky, Late Kieth Birch was simply marvelous and I can't thank them enough for their love. John Boswick and family, Jennie and Gilles Bioche and family, Dave and Cynthia, Marie and Gorge Chaloub, Ellis and Andrea were a source of strength. The pastoral Care team at Mercy Medical Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa were a life-wire for survival: Tammy Buseman, Ben Danielson, Elizabeth Dickey, Mark Eccles, Mark McDermott, Ryan and Sr. Sussan O'Connor, Sr. To my immediate family members, Jude, David, John and late Godwin Komboh, and also, to all my our extended family members, I say a big thank you for being there for me. To you all I say, your different contributions enriched this work. Words cannot adequately communicate the depth of my gratitude. May God bless you richly.

Dedication

Godwin Terlumun Komboh (1976-2016)

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Chapter One: Ruptured Relationships

Introduction

Catholics are increasingly caught up in interreligious violence in Nigeria. Such interreligious violence is particularly strong in the northeastern State of Taraba, Nigeria. The violence there has engaged scholars from a variety of disciplines, approaches, and theoretical frameworks. Research indicates that a monocausal explanation of interreligious violence is grossly inadequate.¹ Understanding interreligious violence is complex and requires a framework that combines relevant elements from history, religion, and culture. The bigger question for leadership of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, however, is how to adequately respond to such violence. This chapter explains the composition of Taraba State, and examines the background to these interreligious crises. It further explores the nature of interreligious violence in Taraba State. It specifically reviews the relevant literature associated with interreligious violence in Nigerian society by identifying fractured relationships and why they arise.

Nature's Gift to the Nation

When Taraba State was created in August 27, 1992, it was designated as nature's gift to the nation. Nature connotes "the phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations."² The word nature comes from old French, which is Latin *natio*, and *nasci*, "to be born." The word nature is thus

¹ Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998), 12.

² "Definition of Nature," accessed on September 11, 2016.

<https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=meaning%20of%20nature>.

linked with the place of one's birth.³ This designation is particularly apt because of the unique composition of the state and all its rich endowments. Principally, these endowments include the people, its ethnic compositions, cultural diversity and ethos. The geography of the state includes large deposits of minerals beautiful mountain ranges, and extensive farmland. All holds great potential for economic growth. The state also commands a unique place as a strategic link between the northern and southern states in the northeastern part of Nigeria. The feeling is truly right that "Taraba state is a reservoir of natural resources capable of promoting the storied greatness of the nation if carefully harnessed. Its vast natural potential can be classified under agriculture, mineral deposit and tourism."⁴ However, for all its beauty and natural endowments, Taraba State has been engulfed in frequent tensions, divisions, conflicts, and distress as regular features.

Taraba State is experiencing a combination of crises over its natural resources. These unfortunate conflicts, in particular ethnic and interreligious violence is the subject matter of this chapter and what follows. Since, experience is foundational in the practical theological enterprise; the work will interrogate these experiences from a theological perspective. Similarly, other crises will be examined which serve as precipitating factors. Very pertinent to these crises are the geography, culture, and civilization of the state that often become points of disagreement.

Taraba State is named after Taraba River that traverses the southern part of the state. The state capital is Jalingo and is home to the administrative and political base of the state. The state was created from the former Gongola State, by a declaration of the Military Government of General Ibrahim Babangida. Taraba State is bounded in

³ "Definition of Nature."

⁴ "Taraba State at a Glance," accessed on September 8, 2016, <http://tarabastate.gov.ng/about/>.

the west by Plateau State and Benue State, and on the eastern border by the Republic of Cameroon.⁵ It has a land area of 54,426 km². The state is divided into sixteen local government areas.⁶ These include Ardo Kola, Bali, Donga, Gashaka, Gassol, Ibi, Jalingo, Karin Lamido, Kurmi, Lau, Sardauna, Takum, Ussa, Wukari, Yoro, and Zing. The local government areas are further subdivided into 165 electoral Wards.⁷ These areas constitute administrative units in three geopolitical zones with a total population of three million people. The three geopolitical zones are northern senatorial zone, central senatorial zone and southern senatorial zone.⁸ It is bounded by Bauchi and Gombe States on the northern part, Plateau and Nassarawa States on the western part, and Adamawa State on the eastern part. It is composed of different ethnic groups, making it one of the most ethnically diverse states in Nigeria. This many diverse ethnic groups are principally farmers and hunters whose life is basic and simple. The richness of the state is in its geography, peoples, their hospitality and down to earth approach to life lives several impressions to first time visitor to the state.

Geography

The geography of the state is captivating and richly endowed. The Adamawa Mountains that spread in the southern part of the state are nature's true gift to the state. They provide scenic view and excellent farm lands. The state, as an agrarian state, has a great percentage of its populace engaged in farming as an occupation. As a

⁵ Abdulbarkindo Adamu and Alupse Ben, "Violent Conflict in Divided Societies the Case Study of Violent Conflict in Taraba State (2013 - 2015): The Deeper Reality of the Violent Conflict in Taraba State and the Plight of Christians," *Nigeria Conflict and Security Analysis Network Working Paper 2* (November, 2015): 10.

⁶ Abel A. Adebayo and Emeka D. Orunoye, "An Assessment of Climate Change in Taraba State, Nigeria," *Nigerian Journal of Tropical Geography* 4, no. 2 (2013): 2.

⁷ Bashir Abbas, and Ahmad Baba Muhammed, "Challenges of Democratization at the Grassroots in Nigeria: Case Study of Taraba State," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 7 (2012): 99.

⁸ Abbas and Muhammed, *Challenges of Democratization at the Grassroots in Nigeria*, 99.

result of the fertile soil of the state, the predominant occupation is farming which is done by about seventy five percent of the population. Taraba State has a tropical climate, characterized by dry and wet seasons.⁹ The rainy season runs from April through October while the dry season is between November and March. The dry season reaches its peak in January and February when the dusty northeast dry wind (hamattan) blows across the state.¹⁰

The state's topography comprises undulating plains and rising hills with five vegetative zones. This exciting topography makes it unique throughout the whole country. These diverse five vegetations are: Sudan Savannah, Guinea Savannah, Derived Savannah, High Forest and Mountain Forest. An explanation is offered for three of the types of vegetation zones that form the savannah. The Guinea Savannah is marked by mainly forest and tall grass found in the southern part of the state, in the local government areas of Wukari, Takum, and Donga. The Sudan type is characterized by short grasses interspersed with short trees found in Jalingo, Lau, and Ardo Kola local government areas. The semi temperate zone is characterized by luxuriant pasture and short trees as found on the Mambilla plateau. These make the soil very fertile for farming.¹¹ Some of the cash crops produced in the state include coffee, tea, groundnuts and maize. Crops such as rice, sorghum, millet, cassava, and

⁹ G.B. Taphee1 and A.A.U. Jongur, "Productivity and Efficiency of Groundnut Farming in Northern Taraba State, Nigeria," *Journal of Agriculture and Sustainability* 5, no. 1 (2014): 49.

¹⁰ Taraba State Ministry of Health, *Strategic Health Development Plan 2010 – 2015*, (Jalingo: Taraba State Government, 2010), 16.

<http://www.mamaye.org.ng/sites/default/files/evidence/TARABA2.pdf>.

¹¹ Taraba State Ministry of Health, *Strategic Health Development*, 16-17.

yam are also produced in commercial quantity.¹² It is in the process of farming that the inhabitants of Taraba often clash over ownership of farmlands.

The state has vast lush grassland that supports cattle grazing. Its rivers/lakes hold great potential for the development of fisheries.¹³ Taraba State is drained by four major rivers: the Benue, Donga, Taraba, Ibi and their tributaries. They arise from the Cameroon Mountains, draining almost the entire length of the state in a north and south direction to link up with the Niger River. The state has about 500,000 ha of water bodies and 142 natural ponds. These rivers and ponds in Taraba State are major sources of livelihood for those who fish and their households.¹⁴ With an expanding population, of 2,294,800 people, this numbers a male figure of 1,171,931 and a female figure of 1,122,869.¹⁵ Taraba State is heterogeneous in ethnic composition.

As a result of Taraba's considerable natural endowments, particularly in its central and southern parts, Taraba State is attractive to migrating herdsmen and pastoralists. It is an economic gateway to southern Nigeria from the northeast for the transportation of cattle and other farm products to the south. Consequently, there have been increased but undocumented levels of internal migrations from the far north, including the border areas into central and southern Taraba, where Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen come in search of grazing fields and for other economic reasons.¹⁶

¹²A. A. Eghe, S. A. Oluseun and P. F. Ogbearaeno, "Assessment of Field Maintenance Practices of Coffea Arabica among Coffee Farmers in Taraba State, Nigeria," *Journal of Innovation and Development Strategy* 2, no. 3 (2008): 6.

¹³ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 10.

¹⁴ Bennadette T. Fregene, "Economic and Social Analysis of Artisanal Fishermen in Taraba State, Nigeria," in *Freshwater, Fish and the Future: Proceedings of Global Cross-Sectoral Conference*, eds. William M. Taylor et al. (Bethesda: American Fishery Society, 2016), 148.

¹⁵ National Population Commission of Nigeria, "State Population," accessed October 7, 2016, <http://www.population.gov.ng/index.php/state-population>.

¹⁶ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 10.

In the process of grazing their cattle, they often destroy farms, resulting in clashes between these pastoral headsmen and farmers.

In addition to the above are the occurrences of natural disasters in the state. Taraba State has experienced various degrees of disasters over the years. Some are natural such as flooding, while others are man-made, such as road mishap, fire outbreak, and communal conflicts. The most common disaster incidence in the state includes flooding, which could be as a result of the problem of climate change. Climate change and global warming is also being acknowledged as a key environmental problem in Taraba State. It caused food shortages in 2015 to 2016. Climate change has led to reduced precipitation, increased temperature, and irregular relative humidity. The consequence of climate change results in direct and indirect effects on crop and livestock production.¹⁷

Following natural disasters are the growing ethno-religious conflicts resulting from longstanding mutual suspicion and distrust.¹⁸ Taraba State is a Christian majority state in the northeastern region. It is deeply divided along religious lines between Christians, primarily indigenous farmers, and settler communities, primarily Hausa-Fulani Muslims or including herdsmen.¹⁹ Some of the conflict in Taraba since the creation of the state is linked to inter-tribal and inter-ethnic contestations. Yet, evidence from the current conflict goes beyond this narrative.²⁰ Recent engagements from this region shows that these contestations and attacks are committed with intent to destroy a particular religious group, in this case the Christians. In ethnic terms, they

¹⁷ T. Bako, L. A. Oparaku and J. M. Flayin, "The Environmental Issues of Taraba State," *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research* 7, Issue 2 (February, 2016): 292.

¹⁸ E. D. Oruonye, Y. M. Ahmed and E. Tukura, "Strengthening Capacity Building for Disaster Management in Taraba State: A Panacea for Sustainable Development," *International Journal of Development Research* 6, no. 3 (2016): 7209.

¹⁹ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 50.

²⁰ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 11.

are also targeted at indigenous groups such as the Jukuns, Kutebs, Chambas, Kakas, Panso, Kaambu, Bandawa, and especially the Tiv people who are 99% Christians.²¹ In a way, the killings are driven by a religious supremacist ideology to ensure Islam dominates all aspects of life in Taraba State. The Taraba conflict indicates that there is an Islamic agenda and a deliberate drive by Muslims to propel Islam into dominating all aspects of life, social networks, institutions and values in Taraba State.²²

Judging from the above, the crises in Taraba go beyond struggle for religious supremacy. Continuous emphasis on environmental resources and contestation over land denies the current reality on the ground. The contention and attacks demonstrate that the atrocities committed by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen in Taraba State are targeted at indigenous Christian farmers, particularly in central and southern Taraba. In these areas, it is Christians that are killed and displaced, their land and farms taken over, their shops burnt and businesses destroyed.²³ Such violence destroys civility and enthrones a culture of violence in Taraba state.

Civilization and Culture

The word culture is used to describe the way of life of a people. It embodies the language of the people, their political and social organization, belief and religion, and their literature and art. It may also include the material things the people produce and as well as their means of obtaining food and raw materials. The materials in question include houses, weapons, tools, utensils, clothing, crafts, and ornaments.²⁴ More specifically, culture is defined as the distinctive pattern of behavior, symbols, artifacts, ideas and values of a human group. It also refers generally to the objective

²¹ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 11.

²² Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 48.

²³ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 51.

²⁴ Victor I. Lukpata and Solomon E. Asha, "Culture, Tourism, and Sustainable Development in Nigeria," *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa* 2, no. 1 (2014): 42.

constellation of traits and pattern, which differentiates one human group from another. Anthropologists define culture as consisting of three basic elements: human behavior, artifacts (such as signs, buildings and all man-made materials), and belief system (such as religion, moral and civic codes) of the people.²⁵ Culture is “a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols.”²⁶ Culture, from such a view, maybe referred to as a text, something that needs to be interpreted through the investigation of symbols. For Geertz, interpretation involves the production of “thick descriptions,” in which behavioral practices are described in sufficient details to trace inferential associations between observed events.²⁷ Culture consists of these three basic elements named above and differentiates one human group from another, as a result there is bound to be more than one culture in a multi-ethnic state as Taraba. Within this mix, it is no wonder that at times relations are viewed as a blessing and a source of tension in the state.

Taraba has about 80 indigenous ethnic groups each having its own culture or way of life that differentiates it from the rest. These are manifested in their languages, food behavior, artifacts, house types, dressings, technologies, arts, songs, and belief systems. Culture is taught, learned, and shared as the knowledge acquired is passed on from generation to generation. In the process of transmitting cultural values these ethnic groups pass on prejudices and stereotypes about other ethnic groups.²⁸ Such perceptions create tension and anxiety overtime causing difficulties in relationships

²⁵ Azalahu Akwara F. et al, “The Impacts of Culture and Religion, Ethnicity, Politics and Poverty on Ethnic Violence in Plateau State of Nigeria,” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 4, no. 14 (2013): 660.

²⁶ Prinz Jesse, "Culture and Cognitive Science," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 edition), accessed September 21, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/culture-cogsci/>.

²⁷ Jesse, *Culture and Cognitive Science*.

²⁸ Lukpata and Asha, "Culture, Tourism and Sustainable Development in Nigeria," 42.

among the ethnic groups in the state. Again, as a result of the varieties of cultures, and the kinds of perceptions each has of the other, it create potentials areas of conflicts with every group projecting its interests in resources allocation, management, and control as well as claiming rights over different resources. Unfortunately, cultural plurality of the society has become associated with recurring conflicts in the state, in particular ethnic and religious, among others. The implications of the conflicts have brought about high degrees of loss of human, animal and material resources, in the state.²⁹

Taraba State's ethnic groups have their distinct historical and cultural heritages. This is a fact arguably supported by "a federal government demographic survey in 1976, which identified 394 language groups, one put it as high as 400 with the highest density of languages in Taraba and Adamawa States."³⁰ Chiefly among them include Mambilla, Chamba, Jukun, Fulani, Tiv, Ichen, Jenjo, Kuteb, Mumuye, Hausa, Munga, Wurkun, Yandang, Kabawa and Karimjo. Others are Bandawa, Kaka, Bambuka, Kambu, Zo, Kunini, Loo, Nodoro, Panso, Shomo and Tigun. Taraba State is the microcosm of the Nigerian nation.³¹ Sardauna local government area of Taraba state, clearly illustrates this fact. Ethnic composition in Sardauna local government area is very complex and intermixed. This is because of the overlapping nature of cultural and traditional practices that have existed among ethnic inhabitants in the area. Inter-ethnic relations in the area have largely been driven by and sustained through customary norms of the people. This process began to be undermined with

²⁹ Abbass Isah Mohammed, "No Retreat No Surrender Conflict for Survival between Fulani Pastoralists and Farmers in Northern Nigeria," *European Scientific Journal* 8, no. 1 (2014): 335.

³⁰ Babatola Adeleye Marcus, "Ethnic Politics and Religion in Nigeria: Implication for National Integration," *Global Journal of Political Science e and Administration* 3, no. 3 (2015): 3.

³¹"*Taraba State at a Glance*," accessed September 8, 2016, <http://tarabastate.gov.ng/about/>.

the development of colonial domination that informed the rise of group consciousness in the post colonial era. Islam and Christianity are dominant but these ethnic groups still intermix their traditions with both Islam and Christianity. The elite often manipulate the internal solidarity and cohesion existing among these ethnic groups to their advantage, especially when they lose elections or are not given desired political appointments. They readily incite their fellow tribe members to violence, claiming ethnic discrimination for their failures.³²

Much of the literature³³ pays attention to the underlying sociopolitical, economic, and governance factors that precipitate violent conflicts generally.³⁴ Religious violence in Nigeria is not entirely religious because most of the violence has ethnic, economic, or political underpinnings. A crisis may begin as an ethnic or political conflict and metamorphose into a religious crisis, or vice versa.³⁵ Taraba state is a microcosm of the larger Nigerian context of what is to be understood as ethno religious violence, since various variables are in opposition to each other in Taraba state. Cultural diversity in Nigeria reflects how different religions serve as a pivot of

³² Edward Nsemba Lenshie and Johnson Abel, "Ethnicity and Citizenship Crisis in Nigeria: Interrogating Inter Ethnic Relations in Sardauna Local Government Area, Taraba State," *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 6, no. 3 (2012): 50.

³³ See J. I. Elaigwu, "The management of Ethno-religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria: Towards a more [peaceful and Harmonious Geo-polity]" in *Peace Building and Conflict Resolution in Northern Nigeria*, eds. H. Bobboyi and A. M. Yakubu (Kaduna: Arewa House, 2005); A. Jega, "Democracy, Economic Crisis and Conflicts: A Review of the Nigerian Situation," *The Quarterly Journal of Administration* XXXII, no.1 (2004); F. O. Ibrahim, "Poverty and Local Government Performance in Nigeria," in *Towards Improve local Government Management*, eds. S. Dalhatu and M. A. Umar (Kano: Munawar Books, 2003).

³⁴ Sampson Isaac Terwase, "Religious Violence in Nigeria: Causal Diagnoses and Strategic Recommendations to the State and Religious Communities," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 12, no. 1 (2012): 104.

³⁵ Usman Mohammed, "Religion and Violence in Nigeria: 1980-2012," *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 2 (2013): 41.

ethnic and religious conflict in the country.³⁶ These conflicts often stem from struggle over natural resources.

Natural Resource Crisis

Many of the conflicts in Taraba revolve around natural resources. These include mineral resources, water resources, agricultural resources, forest resources, and atmospheric resources.³⁷ An important resource is the land. Land in Taraba State is lush, and fertile. Understanding this supplies our interest and reason why important natural resource is essential. Land fertility is a unified factor to be considered in an attempt to understand how land use principles and practices are perceived and how it is culturally constructed in different contexts. It is very important to understand that different perceptions of land use principles and practices is not only a matter of power and wealth, but is loaded with meaning. Land is *sine qua non* to life; it is a bridge between livelihood and beyond, as people spend useful parts of their living on land till transition to grave for external preservation inside the land. Hence, the way by which people perceive land culturally may be instrumental to how disputes between agriculturalist and pastoralists as well as land resource explorers are handled among farmers in Taraba State.³⁸ Agriculturalists and pastoralists differ dramatically regarding practices of land use. Many disputes occur around water sources where farmers grow vegetables in the dry season and herders water their cattle when crop damage occurs, and it does frequently, conflict ensues when vegetable farmers claim rights to grow vegetables near the water sources and that herdsmen should stop

³⁶ John Lola Okunola, "Solidarity Step: Inter-Religious Unity in Nigeria," *Journal of Stellar Peacemaking* 4, no. 1 (2009): 4.

³⁷ A. A. Adesopo and A. S. Asaju, "Natural Resource Distribution, Agitation for Resource Control Right and the Practice of Federalism in Nigeria," *Journal of human Ecology* 15, no. 4 (2004): 278.

³⁸ Bolarinwa Kolade Kamilu, Oluwakemi Enitan Fapojuwo and Foloruso Ibrahim Ayanda, "Conflict Resolution Strategies among Farmers in Taraba State Nigeria," *OIDA: International Journal of Sustainable Development* 05, no. 01(2012): 12.

destroying their crops. The herders see this act as sabotage, saying that their cattle need to be watered somewhere.³⁹

Addressing land use is therefore significant to dealing with ongoing conflicts between mostly Fulani Muslim herdsmen and Tiv and Jukun Christian agriculturalists. This type of conflict is spreading to other parts of Nigeria. Many parts of central and northeastern Nigeria have recorded many violent disputes between indigenous farming communities and pastoral herdsmen in recent years, due to increasing desertification and consequent population pressure in the country's northern fringes. This forces grazers away from their original land. As a result, many pastoralists have started pushing southwards in search of grazing land, accounting to a large extent for the conflict between the Tiv and Hausa Fulani people in June 2001.⁴⁰

There are many potential parties to natural resource conflict, including farmers, pastoralists, fishermen, and hunters. Increasingly, they are also opposed to modern institutions created and protected by the state, such as national parks, biodiversity reserves, and forestry zones.⁴¹ Taraba state is home to one of the largest national parks in the country, no conflicts between park officials and poachers, hunters, and farmers is significant. Of all the conflicts that occur, the category that has received most attention is that between pastoralists and agriculturalists. The major reason for this is that "the conflict between livestock producers and cultivators is dominant both geographically and in the literature, principally because it occurs

³⁹ Kamilu, Fapojuwo, and Ayanda, *Conflict Resolution Strategies among Farmers*, 12.

⁴⁰ Emeka E. Obioha, "Climate Change, Population Drift and Violent Conflict over Land Resources in North Eastern Nigeria," *Journal of Humanities and Ecology* 23, no. 4 (2008): 318.

⁴¹ Roger Blench, *Natural Resource Conflicts in North-Central Nigeria: A Handbook and Case Studies* (London: Mandarins, 2004), i.

throughout the semi-arid zone.”⁴² Taraba state partly belongs to this semi - arid zone. Due to heavy use of the environment by pastoralists and agriculturists alike, environmental degradation has been on this site. Environmental degradation refers to the process or situation of depreciation in quantity and/or quality of the resources of the environment such as air, water resources, mineral resources, land, flora, and fauna as a result of harsh climatic factors, pollution, and/or unsustainable exploitation by human beings. One notable implication of environmental degradation for social existence is that it usually disrupts the socio-economic life of the human population immediately dependent on natural resources for sustenance. When there are weak regulatory mechanisms in a society, the level of competition among the dependent population may be exacerbated significantly, engendering conflicts leading to a social political crisis.⁴³

Social Political Crisis

A few specific issues are social and political which drive conflicts in the state. They tend to work in combination to become a major concern, these include conflation of religion, ethnic, and geographical (zones) identities, political contentions combined with identity based historical grievances, and the settler-indigene conflicts. All these are the social and political factors inherent in the production of crisis in the state. The state also has large populations of both Christians and Muslims. While ethnic diversity could be a source of strength, it instead caused conflict that stalled development in most parts of the State. Most of these ethnic conflicts are rooted in historical animosity, mutual suspicion, and distrust among the different ethnic groups. These divisions have been exploited by politicians for electoral advantage, thereby

⁴² Blench, *Natural Resource Conflicts in North-Central Nigeria*, 3.

⁴³ Freedom C. Onuoha, "Environmental Degradation, Livelihood and Conflicts: A Focus on the Implications of the Diminishing Water Resources of Lake Chad for North-Eastern Nigeria," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 8, no. 2 (2008): 38.

deepening differences among the people.⁴⁴ A major crisis that combined all the different aspect of the social and political in the state is the Jukun-Chamba/Kuteb conflict in the Takum local government area of the state. The crisis has been festering for years due largely to the absence of a decisive intervention from the state or its agencies. The bodies designed to handle such conflicts often instead contribute to their protracted nature. Sometimes they lack the required skills and attitudes to mediate in the conflict. Often the political, ethnic, and religious sentiments that underlie their skills as arbiters affect the management of the conflict.⁴⁵ Political polarization has gradually turned into physical segregation too: an increasing number of Tiv have fled into Benue as violence intensified in Taraba.⁴⁶ In the midst of political tensions, the elite have exploited the situation to their advantage. Observers have noted that politics rather religion is often at the root of many crises in the state and Nigerian society at large.

These observers also noted the role of the elites in the area who spread ethnic sentiments to secure local, state and federal government appointments. The manipulations of people along ethnic and religious differences create suspicion and with that, people are unable to face their common adversaries of poverty and underdevelopment.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ E. D. Oruonye, Y. M. Ahmed, and E. Tukura, "Strengthening Capacity Building for Disaster Management in Taraba State: A Panacea for Sustainable Development," *International Journal of Development Research* 6, no. 3 (March, 2016): 7207-7208.

⁴⁵Chinyere N. Alimba, "Probing the Dynamic of Communal Conflict in Northern Nigeria," *African Research Review* 8, no. 1 (2014): 194.

⁴⁶Middle Belt, not Killing Belt!: *The History, Dynamics and Political Dimensions of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in the Middle-Belt* (Abuja: ActionAid, 2008), 19.

⁴⁷Ali Andesikuteb Yakubu et al., "An Assessment of the Effects of Communal Conflicts on Production and Income Levels of People Living in Takum and Ussa Local Government Areas of Taraba State, Nigeria," *The International Journal Of Science & Technoledge* 2, no. 7 (2014): 309.

These incessant ethnic, religious, cultural and political conflicts that characterize the Nigerian society as political, ethno-religious and ethno-political conflicts lead to chaos, disruption of democratic governance and worsen the social lives of the people.⁴⁸ Since politics is at the centre of all ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria, if politics is played within modern rules or stipulated norms of behavior, and the political leaders are responsible and accountable to the people they lead, it would reduce ethnic and religious conflicts in the country as well as the level of poverty amongst the people.⁴⁹ This may have helped in solving the continuous agitating problem of the rights of indigenes of a state and immigrants into the state popularly known as settlers.

Indigene and Settler Crisis

In Taraba State, the issues involved in the Tiv-Jukun conflict, especially the one revolving around the indigene-settler matter, exemplify the intricacies and contradictions inherent to intergroup relations in the country.⁵⁰ In these conflicts, new logics of social separation and dichotomy have evolved in many communities in Nigeria.⁵¹ In Taraba State, the use of indigene, a person who is native or indigenous to a place, is connected to an ethnic group, like the Tiv and Jukun Christian agriculturalist. While the settler is the person who has migrated to a place and established permanent residence, here connected to the Pastoralist Fulani Muslim herdsmen, who are mainly seasonal migrants, and predominantly Muslims. Long

⁴⁸ Azalahu et al., *The Impacts of Culture and Religion*, 659.

⁴⁹ Azalahu et al., *The Impacts of Culture and Religion*, 658.

⁵⁰ Mukhtar Imam, Farouq Bibi and Sadequee Abba, "Ethnicity and the Crises of Citizenship in Post-Colonial Nigeria: An Impediment to Development," *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* 2, no. 02 (2015): 1029.

⁵¹ Okechukwu Innocent Eme and Anthony Onyishi, "The Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria: A Thematic Exposition," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business* 3, no. 8 (2011): 176.

standing disagreements over land and other resources in the state are usually the remote cause of these conflicts. Although the immediate cause for this conflict in the state is ethno religious. An examination of the Tiv Jukun crisis in relation to the indigene and settler crisis is revelatory. In Taraba State, most local governments do not issue guidelines for defining who is an indigene. In some cases, this leaves families who have lived in the same spot for generations unable to prove they are among that place's original inhabitants. Individuals, especially in rural areas, lack birth certificates and this makes tracing the original inhabitants of a place difficult.⁵² What transpires from the issue is the notion or the perception that the indigeneship of a particular society, group or region confers certain rights, which others should not enjoy by virtue of being settlers or migrants or strangers. Such rights includes but not limited to unhindered access to education and employment opportunities, land, political participations or even right to produce the chief or head of a community. This notion perhaps informs the Jukun's attitude and disposition to the Tiv in Wukari local government of the present-day Taraba State.⁵³ It may also be the principal reason for the indigene settler crisis still being experience in the state and in some local government areas of the state.

There are three major factors advanced to explain the Tiv-Jukun ethnic conflict in the state, particularly as it pertains to the indigene settler conflicts. These are land, Politics and ethno religious factors. Consider the land issue for a start, the general consensus among scholars⁵⁴ is that, inasmuch as other vital factors such as

⁵² Aaron Sayne, *Rethinking Nigeria's Indigene-settler Conflicts* (Washington, D.C: US Institute of Peace, 2012), 3.

⁵³ Abimbola O. Adesoji and Akin Alao, "Indigeneship and Citizenship in Nigeria: Myth and Reality," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 9 (2009): 153.

⁵⁴ See, O.Nnoli, *Ethnicity and Development in Nigeria* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995); S. G. Best, A. E. Idyorough and Z. B. Shehu, "Communal Conflicts and the Possibility of Conflicts Resolution in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Tiv-Jukun Conflicts in

politics have often acted as a stimulant of the crises between the Tiv and Jukun, land remains fundamental in the understanding of the standoff. Both Tiv and Jukun are farmers. About 80% of Tiv people engage in farming as their main occupation. Thus as professional farmers, land, more than any other thing, remains the most valuable resource to the Tiv people. They are therefore often attracted to any fertile land within their immediate locality. The tendency is that whenever there is scarcity of land in the area where Tiv are residing or if the land becomes depleted and infertile; they are bound to migrate to a more spacious and fertile place.⁵⁵ In the process of moving from one place to another, they clash with the host communities. Again as the crisis rages, several political strategies have been adopted as remedial solution to the problem of ethnicity and citizenship in Nigeria. These remedial solutions have assumed some national recognition in the power sharing process and recruitment into civil and public services. The effort is seen by the national government as a way of ameliorating the challenge of ethnic and citizenship often paramount in the indigene and settler crisis. As a means of resolving conflict, some states and local areas government have

Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State,” in *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation*, eds. O. Otite and T. O. Albert (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1999), 82 – 117; Terlumun Avav, *Refugees in Own Country (The Tiv-Jukun Crises) 1990 -93* (Abuja: Supreme Black Communications, 2002); Iorwuese Hagher, *Beyond Hate and Violence: Understanding the Tiv Struggle for Citizenship Rights and Social Justice in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Caltop Publications, 2002); Emeka E. Obioha, “Climate Change, Population Drift and Violent Conflict over Land Resources in North Eastern Nigeria,” *Journal of Humanities and Ecology* 23, no. 4(2008): 314; O. Alubo, *Nigeria: Ethnic Conflicts and Citizenship Crises in the Central Region* (Ibadan: PEFS, 2006); Eugenia M. Genyi and George A. Genyi, “The Nigerian State and Political Violence against the Tiv, 1959 – 2003,” in *The Middle-Belt in the Shadow of Nigeria*, eds. O. O. Okpeh, A. Okau and A. U. Fwatshak (Makurdi: Oracle Business, 2007), 78 – 90; T. T. Shut, “The Settler/Indigene Phenomenon and Conflict Generation in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria,” in *The Middle-Belt in the Shadow of Nigeria*, eds. O. O. Okpeh, A. Okau and A. U. Fwatshak (Makurdi: Oracle Business, 2007), 91 – 107.

⁵⁵ Moses T. Aluaigba, "The Tiv-Jukun Ethnic Conflict and the Citizenship Question in Nigeria," Unpublished paper, Aminu Kano Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria, accessed September 13, 2016, <http://www.ifra-nigeria.org>.

adopted the zoning formula or the rotational system in their politics, to resolve problems associated with power and resources allocation. Similar strategies have been adopted in the case of indigene settler crisis in Taraba State. The examples of Kurmi and Sardauna local government areas in the state are instructive. When crisis erupted over the leadership of the Kurmi local government area and its legislative council, they chose to adopt and reflects these principles from the national government in their politics. It has indeed help in resolving problems associated with power configuration. Whereas, this remains an area that Sardauna local government area failed to implement as the means of resolving their similar leadership conflict which in this context involved problems surrounding political equations. The adoption of the principles of the national government by the Taraba state government is constructed on the fact that it has the capacity for building bridges of unity, cohesion and loyalty among Nigerians. However, the effort has been rendered precarious due to misinterpretation, distortion and political manipulation by dominant ethnic or sectional elite to serve their gregarious interests as against developing a civic identity for Nigeria.

Meanwhile, other issues needed to be addressed are the questions surrounding land tenure system, unemployment and equitability in the distribution of resources and privileges among ethnic inhabitants in Sardauna local government area of Taraba State.⁵⁶ Land tenure system, is one of the greatest problems in Nigeria which prevents a more rational concept of land ownership and agricultural activities. This is because the definition of land ownership is community based. In Sardauna Local Government Area, land question has remained one of the most palpable reasons for conflicting engagements. Instances where individuals own over 10 to 15 ha of lands is very

⁵⁶ Nsemba, and Abel, *Ethnicity and Citizenship Crisis in Nigeria*, 59.

prevalent, most of which are used for grazing of animals and rarely allowed or leaving space for farmers use.⁵⁷ Then, there are those claiming to have settled first on a given land (indigenes) and those who are seen as having arrived later (settlers). These disagreements over land use are central to mutual distrust, generating ethnicity and citizenship question. It fall within the purview of the state government to engineer an inclusive mechanism that would resolve this problem if inter-ethnic relations in the area must be mutual and cordial.⁵⁸

The bigger question for citizenship and the indigene/settler crisis in Nigeria, particularly Taraba state cannot be divorced from colonial policy of divide and rule. This has been consolidated by post colonial elite drive to exploit ethno-religious gap for political reasons and to sustain class competition among the various ethnic elite groups. The struggle by the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria over scarce national resources has necessitated the manipulation of indigeneship/citizenship issues by individuals, groups to gain political and economic advantage and to exclude others. The attempt by those excluded to assert or integrate themselves into the mainstream of social, economic and political life of their community against the resistance of those at the mainstream has been the major factor in explaining most of the ethno-religious and communal violence in Nigeria.⁵⁹ As the Taraba state government ponders on the consequences of these action and what steps to adopt, the reoccurring violence in Wukari local government area of the state has thrown up several fundamental issues for intellectual analysis which relate to indigene/settler conflicts. The impacts of these crises on socio-economic political relations have been

⁵⁷ Nsemba and Abel, *Ethnicity and Citizenship Crisis in Nigeria*, 59.

⁵⁸ Nsemba and Abel, *Ethnicity and Citizenship Crisis in Nigeria*, 59.

⁵⁹ Jaja Nwanegbo, Jude Odigbo and Ngara Christopher Ochanja, "Citizenship, Indigeneship and Settlership Crisis in Nigeria: Understanding the Dynamics of Wukari Crisis," *Journal Research in Peace, Gender and Development* 4, no. 1 (2014): 11.

fundamental. It has led to the erection of new residency and settlement pattern along ethnic and religious divide with the Jukun Christian/Traditionalists occupying one part of the town and the Hausa/Jukun Muslims occupying the other. The psychological impact on both the adult and younger generation of those who witness and experience these conflicts leaves a lot of unresolved queries that would require long years of concerted effort at peace and confidence building to heal the emotional wounds that have been inflicted as a result of the violence.⁶⁰ These could be part of the underlying issues that trigger ethnic and religious crisis.

Ethnic and Religious Crisis

As a state, Taraba has experienced series of conflicts with different manifestations and magnitudes since its creation in 1991. It is significant that an examination of the ethnic and religious conflict in Taraba state is cast against the larger picture of the northeastern states. The state in particular is a major player in the region because of its unique advantage as nature's gift to the nation. It also falls within the area that has remained, to date, a meeting point of four major cultures of the world: the indigenous Sudanic culture represented by the Chadic language speakers; the Nilo-Saharan group of the Kanembu-Kanuri and the Shuwa Arabs; the Middle Eastern culture which brought with it the predominant religion of Islam since the seventh century CE; and the latest arrival being the western culture along with Christianity by the missionaries in the 19th century. The fusion and diffusion of these various cultures have produced a unique society united by economic, geographic and socio political factors. Throughout history, there was continuous east-west and north-south migration of peoples in the states of the northeast due partly to the continuous desiccation of the Sahara and wars of territorial expansion between indigenous states

⁶⁰ Nwanegbo, Odigbo, and Ochanja, *Citizenship, Indigeneship and Settlership Crisis*, 13-14.

in Nigeria before the colonial era.⁶¹ These expansionist wars may have metamorphosed into ethno-religious conflicts in Taraba State today given the nature of the composition of Taraba State.

Ethno religious conflict is a form of conflict supposedly generated on the basis of real or imagined difference rooted in ethnic and religious identities. It is base of the need to avoid the essentialist that characterizes discourses on identity politics, especially the independent power assigned to these identities in shaping political consciousness. The notion of ethno religious identity derives from the congruence and the mutually reinforcing relationships between ethnic and religious identities in the social and political process. As the situation has been well captured, sometimes religious identity becomes part of an ethnic group's identity or vice versa, and presents a volatile social mixture coupled with the power of the ethnic group's myth of common descent.⁶² In essences, "ethno religious conflict is a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious and another of such group in a multiethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation."⁶³ This is the problem of Taraba State.

Taraba state is a Christian majority state in the northeastern region. It is deeply divided along religious lines between Christians who are mostly indigenous farmers, and settler communities that are mostly Hausa-Fulani Muslims or Hausa-Fulani

⁶¹ Muhammad Nur Alkali, Abubakar Kawu Monguno and Ballama Shettima Mustafa, "Overview of Islamic Actors in Northeastern Nigeria," *Nigerian Research Network Working Papers* 2 (2012): 4.

⁶²Samuel Egwu, "Ethno-Religious Conflicts and National Security in Nigeria: Illustrations from the 'Middle Belt,'" in *State, Economy, and Society in Post-Military Nigeria*, ed. Said Adejumobi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011), 49.

⁶³ Olabanji Olukayode Ewetan and U. Ese, "Insecurity and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Development Studies* 5, no.1 (2014): 47.

Muslim herdsmen.⁶⁴ However, those observing the state from outside hold that Taraba state generally have an almost equal distribution of Christians and Muslims. The fact of its rich, long, diverse and multi ethnic history play out in its relations with the different religions in the state. The state has always enjoyed peace until recently. Many allege that the emergent conflicts are part of the grand design of the northern Nigerian Muslims to dominate northern Nigeria: The Taraba conflict indicates that there is a Muslim agenda and a deliberate drive to propel Islam into dominating all aspects of life, social networks, institutions and values in Taraba state. From the above data, it is clearly Christians that are being killed. Again, it is Christian churches, houses, farmlands and shops that are being destroyed. Most significantly, it is the Christians that are displaced, forced to abandon their homes and ancestral land for Muslims to occupy, dominate and rule over.⁶⁵ A case study in Taraba state supports this. It indicates that there is a sophisticated and systematic attack on Christians in Taraba state by Muslim Fulani herdsmen. The study also suggests that apart from land and cattle grazing issues, the persistent attacks by Muslim Fulani herdsmen on Christian communities in Taraba state is also connected to the historical migration of Muslims into non-Muslim territories in northern Nigeria to promote the Islamic religious and missionary agenda in Islamizing all parts of northern Nigeria. The study also states that Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacks help the Muslim political and religious elite to dominate land owned by Christians in Taraba state.⁶⁶ This makes concrete sense, since incidence of interreligious and ethnic crisis are rife when framed within the larger context of the northeastern region. The research believes that without the full understanding of these hidden scripts, it may be difficult to grasp the true

⁶⁴Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 50.

⁶⁵Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 48.

⁶⁶ Arne Mulders, "Crushed but not Defeated: The Impact of Persistent Violence on the Church in Northern Nigeria, Summary Report," *Open Doors International* (2016): 14.

nature of the relationship between human activity, environmental change, social disruption and conflict in northeastern, Nigeria.⁶⁷ Taraba state has continued to witness many conflicts explode which are environmentally induced. These are conflicts arising over grazing land, over cattle, over water points and over cultivable land. While there are conflicts over grazing land and over cattle amongst pastoral people, there are also conflicts over cultivable land amongst peasant farmers within the same ethnic group and also between ethnic groups. Such conflicts amongst pastoralists are common and widespread in Nigeria.⁶⁸ But that these conflicts have erupted several times in the northeast axis of Nigeria, in particular Taraba state. The crisis which usually arise over the scramble for some type of resource in particular: river water and agricultural productive land. These renewable resources by implication seem particularly likely to spark conflicts because their scarcity is increasing rapidly without commensurate replenishment.⁶⁹

This essentially reveals how contentious the struggle over natural resource continually dictates the spread of ethno religious crisis in the state. These ethno-religious identities have become disintegrative and destructive social elements threatening the peace, stability and security in Nigeria.⁷⁰ As a result, “the dynamics of the conflict has made the northern region highly unstable, creating high tendencies for security risks for people and distorting the opportunities for the building of the region in this era of democratic development.”⁷¹

Again, Taraba state and other neighboring states in the northeastern part of Nigeria has witnessed a lot of crisis since the return to multi-party democracy in 1999;

⁶⁷ Obioha, *Climate Change, Population Drift and Violent Conflict*, 314.

⁶⁸ Obioha, *Climate Change, Population Drift and Violent Conflict*, 317.

⁶⁹ Obioha, *Climate Change, Population Drift and Violent Conflict*, 320.

⁷⁰ Eme and Onyishi, *The Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria*, 176.

⁷¹ Alimba, *Probing the Dynamic of Communal Conflict in Northern Nigeria*, 194.

violent conflicts of all kinds have intensified around the country. Statistics on religious crises across the country however show that at least 95 per cent of them occurred in the northern part of the country.⁷² The remote cause of this situation is partly connected with long years of military rule. Massive state failure and the loss of faith in the military and political class forced ordinary Nigerians to shift their loyalty away from the state to ethno-regional and religious networks to protect community interests and seek for alternative political authority or systems.⁷³ The result is widespread political crises with their devastating impacts.

The Impact of Religious Violence

As a result of interreligious and ethnic crisis in Taraba state, the economy of the state is affected as can be noticed “throughout the crisis years in Takum/Ussa local government areas, in the southern parts of the state. There was a decline in the level of agricultural investment/yield, decline in income levels of the people of the area, and increased level of social and residential segregation and damages to lives and property worth millions. The resultant effects of these are high level of poverty and unemployment, particularly to youths.”⁷⁴ Again, “The frequent and persistent ethnic conflicts and religious clashes between the two dominant religions (Islam and Christianity) are a major security challenge that confronts Taraba state in particular and Nigeria at large.”⁷⁵ Taraba state and in general Nigeria, issues about the national question or struggles for control, ownership and participation, especially in state public places, have remained central to the country’s post-colonial experiences. These

⁷² Terwase, *Religious Violence in Nigeria*, 106.

⁷³ Terwase, *Religious Violence in Nigeria*, 13.

⁷⁴ Yuguda Abdulrazak Madu and Goni Ibrahim, "Ethno-Religious Conflict in Taraba State and its Implications on Socio-Economic, Political and Educational Development of Youths," *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Review* 4, no. 3 (2013): 152.

⁷⁵ Ewetan and Ese, *Insecurity and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria*, 47.

issues divide Nigerians into various publics: ethnic and further division into ethnic majority and minorities; indigenes and settlers; religious groups as well as class and gender categories. Each of these publics has different interests which then form the agenda for mobilization and struggles.⁷⁶

In many parts of Taraba state as the research has shown, many instances where interreligious and ethnic crisis has taken place, aside from an intense and unstable political atmosphere, a large proportion of the youth who are able-bodied but idle, unemployed, frustrated and aggrieved with the social system are willing and ready to be recruited and mobilized to engage in political and violent political and ethno-religious conflicts because such offer them the opportunity to break into public and private property and cart away whatever they can find.⁷⁷ Similarly, the government of Taraba state needs to come up with an appropriate “mechanism for reducing poverty, inequality and alienation. This is because in reality, they are the main precursors of violent conflict. Ethnicity and religion only serve as the platforms for the exhibition of deep seated frustrations and hardships.”⁷⁸ Massive displacement of people as a result of the crisis leads to more social ills in the society. As communities are displaced comes the challenge of properly raising a stable family and injecting the right cultural norms in the education of children. Since, there is unrest and families are on the move very little is achieved, proper etiquette for religious practice are not taught leaving room for further disbalance in the religious development of the youths. This gives way to simple brain washing when the youth are manipulated to instigate crisis of

⁷⁶ Ogoh Alubo, "The Public Space in Nigeria: Politics of Power, Gender and Exclusion." *Africa Development* 36, no. 1 (2011): 83.

⁷⁷ Sunday Okungbowa Uhumwuangho and Aluforo Epelle, "Challenges and Solutions to Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Case Study of the Jos Crises," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 13, no. 5 (2011): 119.

⁷⁸ Idahosa Osaretin and Emmanuel Akov, "Ethno-Religious Conflict and Peace Building in Nigeria: The Case of Jos, Plateau State," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 2, no. 1 (2013): 356.

interreligious and ethnic nature in the state. Taraba state, being an ethnic diverse state, major religious issues are heavily contested along the lines of ethnic, clan and sectional interest. This leads to the question of which competing groups tend to adopt exclusionary, winner take-all strategies i.e. the control of state power, resource allocation and citizenship.

A saying goes thus: “there is no smoke without fire.” Religious conflicts in Nigeria have their own causes.⁷⁹ Religious violence in Nigeria cannot be said to be entirely religious, that is because most have ethnic, economic, or political underpinnings.⁸⁰ In Taraba state, the issues of conflicts that lead to violence have a very thin line between them. Many of the crises encountered vary, at face value they look simple but gradually snowball into a large context, in the process acquiring a motive bigger than was initially perceived. This is not specific to isolated issues, instead a number of issues have sprung up and are interrelated. Land, water, forest, religion, ethnicity, power sharing deals in governments, revenue sharing formula, struggles over where a local government headquarters will be sited, universities admissions spaces’ allocations, etc; all actively cause conflicts in the state. The problem of ethno-religious crises in Taraba state is part of the major reality in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, ethno-religious crises have become a part of the national history.⁸¹ There are multiple layers to the problems and each piece of the layer is equally important and must be given due attention. “Put differently, there is apparent anxiety in the land; and the government knows it. Jobless youths, restive and daring ethnic

⁷⁹ John A. Ottuh, “Religious Conflict Resolution in Nigeria (Matthew 18:15-22): A Hermeneutic - Inculturation Approach,” *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 7, no. 6 (2013): 21.

⁸⁰ Mohammed Usman, “Religion and Violence in Nigeria: 1980-2012,” *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 2 (2013): 41.

⁸¹ Charles Alfred Andeshi, Christopher Ale and Daniel Wununyatu, “War Economy of Ethno-Religious Crises: A Study of the Wukari Crises of Taraba State, Nigeria,” *International Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 23.

militias, unrelenting desperations of hired assassins, unprecedented rise in cost of living, and security agencies, these are seasons of anomie which portends danger to the nation.”⁸² Most of the time, Nigerian Christians and Muslims live together harmoniously. However, it is also undeniably true that Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria have increasingly been tainted by competition and conflict.⁸³ Religious violence is traced to a much larger Nigerian experience; here religious disturbances mostly pit Christians and Muslims against each other, while ethnic disturbances involve one ethnic group against the other. Based on these experiences civil disturbances tend to revolve around politics of identity.

Intervention and planning for the long term, seems logical to avert this situations. The efforts and strategies put in at the beginning are fundamental to the success of the interreligious and ethnic crisis. Many have identified a number of gaps that have not been filled by government and the general Taraba society. In different parts of this crisis laden state, there are calls for land reforms to deal with these issues. Meanwhile, other issues needed to be addressed surrounding land tenure system are unemployment and equitability in the distribution of resources and privileges among ethnic inhabitants in places like Sardauna local government area, which is found in the south eastern part of the state.⁸⁴ Hence, a few necessary steps are informative and applicable: A preventive strategy has to adopt a measure of understanding the cause of the conflict. This will provoke the provision of the following facilities to reduce it: enforcement of land control by the government, determination of the extent of boundaries for proper adjustment, provision of basic infrastructural facilities in communities, zoning of political positions in communities, control of arms inflow into

⁸² Eme and Onyishi, *The Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria*, 173.

⁸³ Islamic Actors and Interfaith Relation in Northern Nigeria, *Nigeria Research Network Policy Paper 1* (2013): 12.

⁸⁴ Nsemba and Abel, *Ethnicity and Citizenship Crisis in Nigeria*, 59.

communities, equitable distribution of resources, and promotion of mutual respect for people. The second, which is the long term approach, entails the development of early warning system in communities and the adoption of peace education programme suitable to tackle the peculiar nature of the conflict in communities in Taraba state, the northeastern region and in general the country.⁸⁵ The understanding of the single story narrative in Taraba state as nature's gift to the nation requires isolating the crisis into categories. This overview has attempted to show massively the interrelationships of these conflicts. The next chapter presents a theological method of isolating these categories from the experiences of this single narratives story.

⁸⁵ Nsemba and Abel, *Ethnicity and Citizenship Crisis in Nigeria*, 198.

Chapter 2: Research Method

Introduction

This chapter lays out the method for this dissertation, which is the *see, judge, and act* approach. This is a practical theological method that builds on three categories based on Metz's method: the categories of relationship, narrative, and community. It is hoped that this method has sufficient theological richness to engage both African tradition and Catholic theological wisdom. Such an approach is designed to offer ways of understanding the situation of those in suffering. By adopting Johann Baptist Metz's approach as a hermeneutical and phenomenological approach to method, the research offers a phenomenological approach that starts with the experience and understandings of Africans themselves and Nigerians in particular. The three categories of relationship, narrative, and community are offered to engage the gap between magisterial teaching and everyday experience of the people. These three categories are not stand-alone categories separate from each other, but rather interact with each other in a constant working out of shared praxis.¹ To have a deeper understanding of the adopted theological method of the dissertation, this chapter begins by explaining what the *see, judge* and *act* components of the method entail.

¹ Praxis, as meaningful action, has its roots in classical Greek philosophy. Aristotle distinguished it from *poiesis*, an "action that produces something," Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 149. Later developments, emphasizing its primacy over theory and transformational dimension, appear within the Frankfurt school, e.g., J. Habermas, A. Horheimer, T. Adorno) and in the educational philosophy of Pablo Freire. See Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis, 1993), 64. Contemporary use of the word in theology "shifts the overarching hermeneutical context from intellectual abstraction to active engagement with the world in light of the Gospel," John Swinton, "What is Practical Theology?" in *Religious Studies and Theology: Introduction*, eds. Helen R. Bond, Seith D. Kunin and Francesca Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 396. See also Ondina Cortes, rmi, "Communion in Diversity? Exploring a Practical Theology of Reconciliation among Cuban Exiles" (PhD diss., St. Thomas University, Miami, 2013), 4.

See, Judge and Act

The see, judge and act approach is embedded in praxis, which builds on the concept of *perichoresis* found in the very life of God who is Trinity, Love-in-Action. Building on this theological understanding of God as relationship and communion, culture and experience, tradition and scripture are seen as constantly at interplay with the categories of relationships, narratives, and community. These are in dynamic relationship with each other. Thus, the three categories introduced here for theological reflection and exploration following Metz's approach, interact in shared praxis. By appropriating and linking these three categories with traditional African ways of knowing, meaningful action and sharing may be established. Social violence, in particular ethnic and religious crises affect relations on many fronts especially from lived experience, common culture and faith. Through critical examination of relationships, narratives from disrupted communities in the northeastern state of Nigeria this study will offer reflection on concrete actions to address relations that have been disrupted by violence as they help to build new relationships.

Since, it has been established that different types of crisis promote interreligious and ethnic violence in Taraba State, Nigeria. This research adopts a method that explores such an important intersection. The see, judge and act approach is employed as a method because it seeks to reflect on the reality of the experiences of divisions, exclusion and pain encountered as a result of ethno-religious violence. The see, judge and act method is a hermeneutical search tool of pastoral-theological studies, which is also called the pastoral circle that goes back to the pioneering work of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn and the Young Catholic Workers of the early decades of

the 20th century.² The method of See, Judge, Act appears to have been reignited, as a model which Pope Francis, in keeping with tradition of the past has recently employed its use in *Laudato Si*.³ The document which translates in English, “May You be Praised,” calls for a proper attention and care for the Earth as people share their lives with the Earth. Based on this methodological framework, the Pope calls for an integral ecological conversion and relationship, respecting not only the dignity of the human person as the center of God’s creation, but also other creatures, and the earth in particular. Pope Francis also calls for action oriented towards justice, identification with and liberation of the poor, which is the bone of integral ecology.⁴ As a method popularized by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn and the Belgian Young Christian Worker movement in the late nineteenth century, the “See-Judge-Act” method of social action has philosophical and anthropological roots in the Catholic tradition going back to at least Saint Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, perhaps even earlier.⁵ Cardijn’s See-Judge-Act method has become a widely cited, popular method for social engagement.⁶ The Catholic tradition of practical reasoning builds on the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas. Over the years this Catholic tradition of practical reasoning has been described by the three fold movement of seeing, judging, and acting.⁷ This movement begins within the organized formations of the poor and

² Allan Figueroa Deck, "A Latino Practical Theology: Mapping the Road Ahead," *Theological Studies* 65, no. 2 (2004): 277.

³ Peter Smith, “Review: *Laudato Si*: Love of God, Love of Neighbor, Love of Creation,” *Solidarity: The Journal of Catholic Social Thought and Secular Ethics* 5, no. 1 (2015): 2.

⁴ Fidelis Nwanko, “Igbo Culture and Irish Spiritan Evangelization: Exploring a Post Colonial Igbo Catholic Cultural Identity for the Twenty Century and Beyond,” (PhD diss., St. Thomas University, Miami, 2016), 54.

⁵ Kelley Scott, "Vincentian Pragmatism: Toward a Method for Systemic Change," *Vincentian Heritage* 31, no. 2 (2012): 42.

⁶ Scott, *Vincentian Pragmatism*, 42.

⁷ Raymond Fitz, "Integrating Learning in a Catholic University: An Ongoing Conversation," Lecture, University of Daytona Beach, September, 2010, 11.

marginalized as they analyze ("See") their context, "from below." This analysis of "reality" is then brought into dialogue with the "prophetic" voices of the Bible, enabling "the God of life" to address ("Judge") the social reality. Through this dialogue with the Bible "the shape of the gospel" is used to plan a series of actions ("Act") that will bring about transformation of the social reality, so that all may have life, and have it abundantly.⁸

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice: First, one reviews the concrete situations; seeing, hearing and experiencing the lived reality of individuals and communities; naming what is happening that causes the concern; carefully examining the situation. Secondly, one analyses the situation and makes an informed judgment in the light of social principles. Thirdly, one plans and carries out principles and actions aimed at transforming the structures that contribute to suffering and injustice. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: see (observe), judge, act.⁹

For analysis the pastoral circle is especially helpful as "it emphasizes the ongoing relationship between reflection and action."¹⁰ It is related as indicated above to what has been called the hermeneutical circle or the method of interpretation that sees new questions continually raised to challenge older theories by the force of new situations.¹¹ In order to care for the individual or communities that are involved in crisis, it is pertinent to have an awareness of the social positioning, the context which problems emerge, the spiritual and political values and the assumptions that structure expectation and values. All of these things combine to make up the experience of

⁸ Gerald West, "Reading the Bible with the marginalized: The Value/s of Contextual Bible Reading," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (2015): 243-44.

⁹ Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, sec. 236.

¹⁰ Joe Holland, Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Washington D.C.: Center for Concern, 1983), 8.

¹¹ Holland, and Henriot, *Social Analysis*, 8.

particular challenges and problems.¹² As a result, the research adopts and employs the method of see, judge, act linked with the pastoral circle to explore connections, constantly at play with relationships, narrative and community. This is more so as the focus of the research is on the dialogue of life as a potential response of the Catholic Church to interreligious and ethnic violence in Nigeria. Instead of using only revelation and tradition as starting points, as classical theology has generally done, it must start with facts and questions derived from the world and from history.¹³ “Specifically, it calls for remembering that past which the modern subject has no ‘use’ for, that is, the past of the suffering and the dead, and particularly those who died non- subjects,”¹⁴ in the violence that ensues. If every Christian is a human document to be theologically read individually and collectively, then theological relevance to the daily life of faith community becomes a critical factor.¹⁵ To uphold such a critical factor requires engaging a theologian as an interlocutor. One such theologian is John Baptist Metz.

Johann Baptist Metz

Johann Baptist Metz¹⁶ established himself as one of the most foremost theologically fertile thinkers within the phenomenological tradition. With his study of

¹² John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 192-93.

¹³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 9-10.

¹⁴ Michon Marie Matthiesen, “Narrative of Suffering: Complementary Reflections of Theological Anthropology in Johann Metz and Elie Wiesel,” *Religion & Literature* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1986): 48.

¹⁵ Daisy N. Nwachukwu, “West Africa,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller Mclemore (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 516.

¹⁶ Johann Baptist Metz has frequently asserted that his is a theology oriented not by “system concepts,” but rather by “subject concepts.” “Subject concepts” are to be evaluated not so much by how they cohere into a system as in terms of their capacity to articulate and undergird the ways that specific persons in specific times and places struggle to become and remain subjects: agents of their own histories, persons who recognize the symbols and narratives that make up that history to be their symbols and

memories and the power they play in the ability to remember, he presents a challenge to theology to rethink the activities that drive situations to their basic foundations. Johann Baptist Metz's phenomenological style of reflection is deeply humane and critical, given its historical depth and practical dimension. The mystical-prophetic theology of Johann Baptist Metz offers key forms for realizing the saving power of the Christian proclamation: narrative, memory and solidarity.¹⁷ Metz' hermeneutic process is thus enmeshed within the bloody tapestry of human history, a history that is comprised of sorrow, joy and acute human experiences, especially that of suffering.¹⁸

Born in 1928 a year after his German contemporary Joseph Ratzinger, a few remarkable events were to become major determinants of his theology. Metz grew up through the Nazi takeover of Germany and World War II. In turn, his theology of suffering emerged from his conviction that Auschwitz should be as important to modern Christian theology as the Enlightenment. If modernity turned theology toward the human subject, Auschwitz turned theology toward the cry of the suffering human subject, chastening the Enlightenment's tendency toward a Promethean view of the human person deprived of suffering or weakness. Likewise, if the Enlightenment grounded the Christian church in history, Auschwitz grounds us in the history of the vanquished. In Metz's words, Auschwitz forever symbolizes Christianity's farewell to the forgetfulness of the forgotten. Finally, the crisis of authority that has afflicted modern Christianity can only be addressed through reframing authority within the

narratives, rather than an alienating imposition. See Ashley, J. Matthew, "Johann Baptist Metz," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds. Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 241.

¹⁷ Donald L. Wallenfang, "Listen to Me: The Soteriology of Johann Baptist Metz and its Effect on Ministry with Adolescents," Paper presented to Concilium symposium at Loyola University Chicago, June, 2009, 1.

¹⁸ Wallenfang, *Listen to Me*, 5.

‘dangerous memory’ of Christ’s Passion, granting authority to those who suffer.¹⁹ The memory of the victims forces us to look at history not merely from the standpoint of the successful but from that of the conquered and victims. The past of the victims is full of meaning because it is recognized as an injustice that questions the present. These are dangerous memories because they visit the present and question it. These could be subversive memories with a liberating message for the future. It is necessary, therefore, to take a look at the vanquished and the defeated in history and develop a kind of anti-history.²⁰

Theology is always for Metz “a defense of hope” that cannot be carried off unless it includes unconditional solidarity with and action on behalf of those who suffer, those whose hope is most endangered. In short, it is a hope that must be accompanied by the radical action of Christian discipleship.²¹ “In his view, theology should address believers at those points at which their identity as persons is most threatened by the social and political catastrophes of history.”²² Metz’s theology is therefore, an attempt ‘at a first level of reflection’ to demonstrate the truth and transformative power of Christian faith, but now within the arena of historical catastrophes and political struggles rather than that of the individual’s attempt to make sense of his or her own existence.²³ Metz’s purpose is continually to arouse the question in human subjectivity, so as to initiate the person into a mode of life which is itself an authentic ‘response’ to the question: a Job-like spirituality of lamentation and

¹⁹ J. J. Carney, “From Categorization to Communion Ethnic Identity and Catholic Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda,” *Journal of Religion & Society Supplements* 13 (2016): 194.

²⁰ Manuel Losada-Sierra and John Mandalios, "The Prophetic Reason for Religious and Cultural Understanding," *The International Journal of Civic, Political, and Community Studies* II, no.2 (2014): 16.

²¹ Losada-Sierra and Mandalios, *The Prophetic Reason*, 245.

²² Losada-Sierra and Mandalios, *The Prophetic Reason*, 247.

²³ Losada-Sierra and Mandalios, *The Prophetic Reason*, 245.

complaint.²⁴ Metz's vision entails a more introspective, self-critical attitude on the part of the church.²⁵ In a global perspective such as the one that belongs to our times, Metz points out that the true aim of Christianity is that of running for a praxis aimed to demystify all forms of oppression and suffering in human society.²⁶ Linking the different stages and movements of the see-judge-act approach, and the critical transformative notion of suffering in the theology of Metz, the research draws on the hermeneutical tool of see-judge-act, social analysis with the theology of John Baptist Metz to establish the critical structure of interreligious ethnic crisis in the northeastern part of Nigeria. In the first section of the research it is necessary to look at the social context and identify the main aspects that characterized society at this time. The focus is the on impact of interreligious ethnic violence and social exclusion because the main question being considered is the relation among relationship, narrative, community and interreligious ethnic crisis. This is an intense conflict that breeds sectionalism, competition, intolerance and poverty. This analysis implies a major perception on the first methodological step of see-judge-act theological approach which is to 'see' the situation.

The second step, therefore, will be to reflect on the situation through the scriptures, magisterial teachings and recent pronouncements from local and regional prelates. The question of human dignity in relationship, narrative and community is critical to the research interest. These statements belong to the church's social teachings, theological heritage, and they are the basis of community life as they address different parts of the crisis ridden state. In this second section, the central

²⁴Losada-Sierra and Mandalios, *The Prophetic Reason*, 249.

²⁵ Carmey, *From Categorization to Communion*, 195.

²⁶ Salvatore Muscolino, "Some Philosophical Remarks on the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*," *Online International Review of Philosophy* XI, no. 21 (2016): 77, https://iris.unipa.it/retrieve/handle/10447/181392/302468/21_Muscolino.pdf.

concerns border on the critical challenge of relations among community life, interreligious and ethnic violence. In the third section, some activities for engagement are specifically presented. The aim is to interrogate the experiences of those displaced in the north eastern region in particular those from Taraba State, Nigeria where communities and churches are trying to practice the Gospel amidst these difficult transitions. In essences, it is a matter of attending to 'what is going on' in the lives of individuals, families and communities.²⁷ The research is linked to the four stage movement pattern of Holland and Hen riot pastoral circle method. Chapter one deals with the stage of insertion that is the research assumptions, biases and context. Chapter two and three delineates linkages, set the method for connections and draws approaches. Chapters four, five and six deal with the social analysis. Chapter seven explores the stage of theological reflection and charts the path to pastoral planning and action within the Nigerian social context.

The Social Context

Practical theology understands theology as faith seeking understanding, 'fides quaerens intellectum.' However, local theologies show that 'understanding' itself is deeply colored by cultural context.²⁸ This means for contextual theology to be precisely contextual, there must be recognition of the validity of another locus theologicus: present human experience. Theology that is contextual realizes that culture, history, contemporary thought forms and so forth are to be considered, along with scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theological expression.²⁹ Bevan elaborates the reason for adding experience/context to the traditional theological

²⁷ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 34.

²⁸ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 75.

²⁹ Steven B. Bevan, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 4.

source as the revolution in thinking and understanding the world that is characterized as the turn to the subjective at the beginning of modern times. While classical theology understood theology as something objective, contextual theology understands theology as something unabashedly subjective. By subjective, he does not mean relative or private or anything like that but the fact that the human person or human society, culturally and historically bound as it is, is the source of reality, not a supposed value and culture free objectivity already out there now real.³⁰

Similarly, the phenomenon of interreligious and ethnic violence, although complex and multifaceted is a reality that must be confronted. Principally, inter-religious conflict can be referred to as a state of disagreement between two religious persons regarding who is, or who is not holding absolute religious truth. It occurs when members of different religions are engaged in argument which often goes with bickering, controversy, demonstration, debate, or squabble over religious beliefs and practices.³¹ In effect, interreligious and ethnic violence at this level creates self harm, affects individuals, families, communities and the society in a challenging way. It leaves behind a variety of social, economic, psychological, physical and spiritual issues. “It confronts us with deep spiritual questions of meaning, hope and social cohesion and poses important theological questions which are pastorally and highly significant.”³² Two explanations are commonly posed when analyzing interreligious violence. First, the structural approach suggests that economic grievances eventually lead to violence. However, while the degree of poverty is comparatively similar across districts in northern Nigeria, they exhibit varying degrees of interreligious

³⁰ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 4.

³¹ Dele Adetoye and Mike Opeyemi Omilusi, "Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democracy in Nigeria," *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2015): 53.

³² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 194.

violence. Second, the rational choice approach suggests that elites use religious narratives in an instrumental manner to mobilize their followers. Yet, the question remains why some leaders utilize this rhetoric while others do not.³³ Essentially, there is a variance in inter-religious violence best explained by a combination of religion specific and non-religious surrounding conditions.

The research briefly highlights these conditions. The religion specific condition is traced to a historical narrative which is commonly held. No one can contest that interreligious conflict has been a problem in this religiously diverse country. Nigeria's population of over 170 million people is almost evenly divided between Christians and Muslims, and religious violence has cost Nigeria dearly.³⁴ The invasion of a Jihadist group in northern Nigeria brought Islamic religion in this part of Nigeria earlier than Christian Missionaries that later captured the Southern parts of Nigeria and introduced Christianity. Significantly, the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 brought together the two religions demarcated by ethnicity. These two religions subdued the traditional religion hitherto known by various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. Hence, ethnic chauvinism, border disputes and Islamic verses Christianity conflicts remain the main source of instability in Nigeria.³⁵

The non religious conditions revolve around Nigeria's experience of a period of post-civil war reconciliation and nation building following the end of the civil war in 1970. The successive governments of Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed and

³³ Jonas B. Bunte and Laura Thaut Vinson, "Local Power-Sharing Institutions and Interreligious Violence in Nigeria," *Journal of Peace Research* (2015): 1-2.

³⁴ Robert Dowd, "Religious Diversity and Violent Conflict: Lessons from Nigeria," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 38, no. 1(2014): 158.

³⁵ Christian Chukwuebuka Ezeibe, "Inter-Religious Conflicts and Crisis of Development in Nigeria: Who Benefits?" *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences* (2012): 113.

Olusegun Obasanjo, buoyed by strong national economy and bountiful foreign exchange earnings from crude oil, initiated several policies and programmes (including the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps [NYSC] and creation of the new Federal Capital Territory in Abuja, amongst others) with the objective of promoting reconciliation, interethnic, intercultural and interreligious understanding and peace building amongst the country's many diverse constituent groups and nationalities. Conversely, the country's return to civilian democracy as from 1979 coincided with a period of economic decline, as Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and other economic indicators started to falter due to the collapse of global crude oil prices. By the middle of the 1980s, the country had been forced to embrace and implement various austerity measures and structural adjustment policies. The combination of economic decline, harsh macro-economic policies, and fierce competition among various interest groups for economic and political opportunities, had the unfortunate consequence of reversing many of the gains of the post-civil war nation building and sharpening the divide between various social, ethnic and religious groups in the country.³⁶

As a consequence, both Nigerian Christianity and Islam are highly heterogeneous, with great intra and inter-religious differences in terms of numbers, organizational structures, hierarchies and external influence. Fragmentation often leads to intra- and inter-religious dissent, giving room to feelings of both inferiority and superiority that may misguide religious fundamentalists to defensively or offensively pursue their goals.³⁷ Apart from extremist groups that are confined to small

³⁶ Aliyu Ahmed-Hameed, "Interfaith Dialogue: Preventing Extremism and Interreligious Conflict in Northern Nigeria," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 4, no. 11(2015): 82-83.

³⁷ Matthias Basedau, Peter Körner and Johannes Vüllers, "Clash of the Denominations' in Africa? A Controlled Comparison of Inter-Religious Violence in

constituencies, there is only weak evidence of religious or political leaders openly and directly inciting violence by respective calls based on religion. However, politicians often try to capitalize on religious divides, addressing their constituencies by highlighting common religious identities at the national or local levels.³⁸ The recent increase in violence in intra- religious conflicts is a very worrisome new development that has caught the attention of clerics. It is surely a very dangerous dimension to religious intolerance, even within a particular religion. In some cases, ethnicity has been the basis for violent intra- religious conflicts adding a new dimension to religious conflicts in northern Nigeria. The tendency to identify some ethnic groups with a particular religion easily gives credence to the use of religion for the manipulation of other differences.³⁹

Since the early 1980s when the Maitatsine riots ushered in a regime of religious fundamentalism in the northern parts of the country, ethno-religious categories have been more frequently used to describe conflicts that involve an intersection of ethnic and religious identities. Again for partly historical reasons, this has been true of the north where, as has been pointed out, religious differences play a major part in ethnic differentiation. Thus, conflicts between Hausa/Fulani and minority ethno-religious groups are described as ethno-religious. However, the increased politicization of religion by the state, including the adoption of Islamic penal law by several northern states in the Fourth Republic, has led to the generalization of ethno-religious conflicts all over the country.⁴⁰ On a strictly

Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Tanzania," Lecture, ECPR-IPSA Joint Conference "Whatever Happened to North-South," University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, February, 2011, 9.

³⁸ Basedau, Körner and Vüllers, *Clash of the Denominations*, 10.

³⁹ Y. L. Gambo and M. M. Omirin, "Ethno Religious Conflict and Settlement Pattern in Northern Nigeria," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 3 (2012): 130.

⁴⁰ Gambo and Omirin, *Ethno Religious Conflict and Settlement*, 132.

theological basis, it is difficult to define what would be considered intra- or inter-religious distinctions. Within religions there are denominations and factions that may or may not view themselves as part of a broader whole.⁴¹

Religions with the following characteristics are at particular risk for inter-religious violence: 1) a culture and history of violence, 2) a theology that identifies itself as the one, true religion, and 3) an orientation that keeps it operating as if it were threatened. These factors, coupled with the variables discussed below, place a nation or group at risk for such violence.⁴² In sum, elevated levels of inter-religious violence result from conflict prone religious structures (religious and ethnic identity overlap, demographic change) in combination with non-religious risks in interethnic and social relations as well as tense political processes of change. The difference between elevated levels of inter-religious violence and high levels results from sharp social differences between religious communities and the (historical) politicization of religious ideas and organized extremism.⁴³ The first chapter of the research deals with this phenomena as basis and foreground for the interpretive task. It pulls together all these various elements highlighted providing a richness for reflection on the theological issue at stake.

The Method: Reflecting on the Situation

The second stage of the practical theological method used in this work seeks to analyze and understand the situation using tools of the social sciences and theological Reflection. The current pattern of escalation and intensity of interreligious violence in northern Nigeria presents unique and complex challenges that require deeper reflection and examination rather than superficial stereotyping. In this regard,

⁴¹ Linda M. Woolf and Michael R. Hulsizer, "Intra-and Inter-Religious Hate and Violence: A Psychosocial Model," *Journal of Hate Studies* 2, no. 1 (2002): 3.

⁴² Woolf and Hulsizer, *Intra-and Inter-Religious Hate and Violence*, 10.

⁴³ Basedau, Körner and Vüllers, *Clash of the Denominations in Africa*, 18.

several research and advocacy works by practitioners, experts and community-based organizations have revealed that in order to understand and tackle interreligious conflicts in northern Nigeria, one must go beyond the obvious religious explanations and seek to investigate and identify the root causes of these apparently religious conflicts. Too often conflicts that acquire religious labeling have their roots in dispute, contention or struggle that begun at individual or group levels over non-religious, personal, economic, political and even sometimes mundane issues. Unless one is able to rollback and dig deep to the root causes, the prevention and/or resolution of such conflicts become daunting once it escalates and acquires religious labeling.⁴⁴

The apparent situation of interreligious and ethnic violence in the northeastern part of Nigeria and in particular Taraba state causes great concern and shift many perceptions on how human dignity is viewed. The constant clashes that have been noticed in particular interreligious and ethno religious crises create different patterns of response and sets up new trend in the way engagement, interrogation and relationship are perceived. Many in the crisis ridden state of Taraba and the northeastern part of Nigeria who have been caught in the situation have been left with extremely bitter experiences. They are disgusted with everything and everybody, having lost homes, families, connections and existing ties, the experience for many is liken to an end to their entire existence. Since, this practical theology approach serves as an interpretative tool and draws from context that privileges human experience a critical question to ask is: “what is going on”⁴⁵ Attention is brought back on theology

⁴⁴ Aliyu, *Interreligious Conflict in Northern Nigeria*, 85.

⁴⁵ Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 20.

itself which can be and indeed should be the subject of critical reflection and challenge.⁴⁶

God's action mediated through human action is the theological center of gravity of practical theology.⁴⁷ Therefore, God is relying on human agency to witness to a truth that can only be displayed nonviolently. And God can rely on human agency because God controls history with truth and power that 'refuses to compel compliance or agreement by force'. The truth God offers puts limits on the actions Christians may perform. Christians have the great luxury and dignity of witnessing to a truth they did not create, and cannot defeat, but which claims them only when they renounce the temptation to promulgate it violently.⁴⁸ Crisis situation like this have been repeatedly condemned by the Catholic Church in strong terms. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria came out strong and reflected that across Nigeria many face difficult challenges, veritable threats to human dignity: the challenge of good governance and the attendant stifling of the potential of the governed, the problem of insecurity, the epidemic of corruption, the collapse of moral and technical infrastructure, violation of the rights of the Nigerian citizen on the grounds of ethnic affiliation, religious creed, gender, state or local government of origin. These and other discriminatory practices pose threats to human dignity in the land today.⁴⁹

By specifically highlighting these issues the Catholic bishops captured the feelings of many in the society. They brought to light the plight of those caught in the violence that has affected the northeastern part of the country. Their searchlight aimed at attending to the plight of the people as they indicated that a certain bishop from

⁴⁶ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 90.

⁴⁷ Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory and Action Domains* (Michigan: Williams B. Eerdmans, 1999), 8.

⁴⁸ Joseph M. Incandela, "Playing God: Divine Activity, Human Activity and Christian Ethics," *Crosscurrent* 46, no. 1 (1996): 64.

⁴⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, sec. 2.

those zones of current tragedy had to leave their meeting abruptly because of the thousands of refugees that had flocked to the cathedral and its premises expecting protection and feeding from the bishop and the diocese. Unfortunately, the situation right now, in north east of Nigeria only confirms further killings, burnings and fleeing of defenseless Nigerians creating a heightened sense of unrest and siege for the whole nation. As Nigeria tragically bleeds and burns, the bishops are alarmed at the scale of both human and material destructions, and the disruption of village and community life with increased levels of hatred and potentials for more conflicts in the nation.⁵⁰

The Christian tradition understands the person not as an isolated monad but as existing in multiple relationships and called to live and work with others in the basic communities of family, the church, broader human social communities, and the state.⁵¹ Without doubt, “the thomistic approach enables one to dialogue with all other human beings on the basis of human reason to determine what the moral good for society is.”⁵² The Catholic Church in its teachings and pronouncements have been fervent in advocating for the rights and dignity of all those caught in this difficult situation. As a church it has also acted as first responders by providing shelter and care to those displaced and abandoned in the crisis. But most of all, to get to the roots of the unpleasant situation and experience of interreligious and ethnic crisis it is pertinent that other significant measures are utilized. Here social analysis⁵³ is

⁵⁰ Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, "While Nigeria Bleeds and Burns," Statement on the State of the Nation, September 18, 2015, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.cbcn-ng.org/articledetail.php?tab=16>.

⁵¹ Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891- Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 3.

⁵² Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891- Present*, 9.

⁵³ A situation as described here by Holland and Herriot as having a social analysis that is genuinely pastoral and can be illustrated in what we can call pastoral circle. This circle represents the close relationship between four mediation of experience:

significant to obtain a more complete picture of the social situation as it explores the history and structure of these relationships. “Social analysis examines causes, probe consequences, delineates linkages, and identifies actors. It help makes sense of the experiences by putting them into a broader pictures and drawing connections between them.”⁵⁴ Here attempt is made to make sense of the reality and phenomena that befalls the observation encountered in the first segments. This is the interpretive task of practical theological interpretation.⁵⁵ As it unpacks the church concept of interreligious relationship used as an implicit methodology the practical theological task can be approached. This means, on the one hand, taking very seriously the church’s turn toward the gospel message of Christ and its encounter with culture in the anthropological sense. On the other hand, this means linking faith to the promotion of justice, transformative action, as Catholic social teaching and liberation theology stress.⁵⁶ Similarly, it explores deeply the “signs of the times” in the thought of Vatican II as well as in contemporary Catholic social teaching. But a fundamental gap is noticed between what interests the mainstream Christians and what interests the hierarchies of the church and government. The situation of interreligious conflicts and ethno religious violence’s still exists and to determine the root causes, social analysis helps in isolating the issues at the heart of the phenomena. It will then proceed to theological reflections.

The escalation of armed conflicts in the contemporary world is usually related to one or more of the following: the emergence of nationalism and the political legacies of colonialism and the Cold War; unresolved cultural, religious, or ethnic

insertions, social analysis, theological reflection and pastoral planning. Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, 7.

⁵⁴ Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, 8.

⁵⁵ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 80.

⁵⁶ Allan Figueroa Deck, "A Latino Practical Theology: Mapping the Road Ahead," *Theological Studies* 65, no. 2 (2004): 278.

conflict; the enduring presence of illegitimate, corrupt, authoritarian or repressive regimes and, most importantly, persistent inequalities over access to critical resources.⁵⁷ Ethno religious conflicts imply that these conflicts have both ethnic and religious causes as factors.⁵⁸ Ethnic identities are deeply rooted and complex. They are connected to race, language, land, resources, power and religion. Conflicts that impinge on issues of ethnicity, access to resources, power and religion are difficult to manage.⁵⁹ The truth is that deeply rooted ethnic feuds have found expression in religion and politics leading to violence in the northeastern part of Nigeria. On the other hand, interreligious crisis has to do with two distinct religions whose adherent clash in crisis. The civil war in Nigeria amplified the persistent and frequent insistence on interreligious and ethnic conflicts. It is at the heart of the historical factors that are underneath the constant push to ethno religious crisis. Precisely, the events of the sixties which led to the Nigeria civil war (1967-1970) seemed to have had ethnic and regional undertones than religious. But religion played a covert role in the pattern of killings in the north, at least, that was the perception of northern Muslims, just as the so called massacre of the Igbo in the north took on ethnic and religion cards.⁶⁰ Similarly, ethnic conflicts are often triggered by one ethnic group attempting to dominate and have more access to power and resources. This is particularly strong in contemporary northeastern Nigeria in particular Taraba state, because it is an economically deprived region. Poor infrastructure and the collapse of

⁵⁷ Duncan Pedersen, "Political Violence, Ethnic Conflict, and Contemporary Wars: Broad Implications for Health and Social Well-Being," *Social Science and Medicine* 55 (2002): 175.

⁵⁸ Dogara J. Gwamna, "The Turning Tides of Religious Intolerance in Nigeria: The External Connections," in *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity*, eds. David O. Ogungbile and Akintunde E. Akinade (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2010), 278.

⁵⁹ Thaddeus B. Umaru, *Christian Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria: A Social Political and Theological Consideration* (Milton Keynes: Xlibris, 2013), 74.

⁶⁰ Umaru, *Christian Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria*, 276.

the industries and the agricultural sector have dealt a devastating economic blow to the region. These social economic factors coupled with deep rooted ethnic and religious divides, are powerful contributing factors of conflict and violence.⁶¹ At the end manipulation by the elite class and politicians aimed specifically at the youths becomes a major target which often ends up in more conflicts for personal and political interests. The point is many people are left out in the process but there experience and tragic situations lead to a focus on theological insights from theology, scripture, tradition and catholic social teaching.

There are people who attempt to offer resistance and alternative options to these conflicts. They promote a case for dialogue and encounter, hoping to stop the spiraling affect of misunderstandings, misapprehensions, annoyances and violence. However, belonging to the Biblical tradition, I believe that human interconnectedness takes priority over brokenness. This interconnectedness is the arena in which hope resides and this hope inspires and strengthens Christians to work towards a different world.⁶² This can be done by interpreting that past in a creative way and in a way that offers meaning. According to Metz, communicative reason is not enough to universalize justice and solidarity. This is because communicative reason only accepts what is metabolizable in a shared rationality and fails to take into account the weak, the victims and those who cannot argue or are not present. That is, when facing questions from victims who have suffered an unjust violence, consensus or horizontal communication is worth very little; what matters is to respond to their suffering and injustice. The reason of the defeated is a cry, a denunciation, a demand for justice, and

⁶¹ Umaru, *Christian Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria*, 75.

⁶² Moyaert Marianne, "Biblical, Ethical and Hermeneutical Reflections on Narrative Hospitality," in *Hosting the Stranger between Religions*, eds. Richard Kearney and James Taylor (London: Continuum, 2011), 95.

its strength comes from the experience of injustice and not from communication or persuasive power.⁶³

There should be universal responsibility toward repudiating injustice and alleviating suffering. To Metz, universal responsibility has roots in biblical traditions. Its New Testament champion Jesus of Nazareth looking first to the suffering and not to the sin is the grounding for the Christian perspective of the community of memory. The Christian community acts as a community of the *imitatio Christi* that is the imitation of Christ, a community that follows the paths of Jesus. From a biblical perspective, even the suffering of enemies must be taken into account because it is not up to human beings to define clearly and to delimit the range of this responsibility or the breath of this caring. The neighbor of the Parable of the 'Good Samaritan' is never the only one whom people regard and accept as such.⁶⁴ Metz argues that theology must encounter those who suffer as subjects not as objects. Theologians must encounter others' suffering directly and be involved actively with them and in their situation. Metz insists that human beings as subjects - individually and collectively - must not be alienated from one another in the history of suffering. Mindful of the condition of human existence - embodied in history and society - he claims that humanity cannot attain salvation from suffering apart from others or from society. The recognition of humanity's mutual interdependence testifies to the necessity of solidarity among peoples,⁶⁵ which spurs them to action.

⁶³ Losada-Sierra Manuel and John Mandalios, "The Prophetic Reason for Religious and Cultural Understanding," *The International Journal of Civic, Political, and Community Studies* 11, no. 2 (2014): 14-15.

⁶⁴ Manuel and Mandalios, *The Prophetic Reason*, 17.

⁶⁵ Lee Yongho, "Compassion beyond Boundaries, Solidarity beyond Beliefs: Responding to the Suffering Peoples of Asia Interreligiously-A Comparative Study of Christian and Buddhist Perspectives" (Licentiate thesis, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, 2011), 85.

Action

The research notes that recognition of others as valuable members of the society is important to the challenge of interreligious and ethnic relations. The principle of interreligious hospitality that is common to religion is certainly an area that can be tapped for critical engagement. Seasonal changes and climatic conditions have caused a lot of changes in the way and manner of life of the pastoralists; this comes against a background of the worsening of relationship between pastoralist and agriculturalist. Another concern is the natural resource scarcity that confronts them on a daily basis.

When climate change hazards such as heavy droughts and famine, erratic weather seasons and, in some areas like in the north, prolonged dry spells occur in Nigeria, it is normally viewed in relation to environmental degradation, natural resource scarcity, migration and food shortage. Little or no attention is paid to how climate change can induce conflicts.⁶⁶ But, recent developments have shown that desert encroachment, accompanied by severe droughts in the North have denied herdsmen arable grazing grounds for their animals, hence changing their designation towards the Southern parts of Nigeria, where some lush green vegetations could easily be assessed.⁶⁷ The fact is climate change in Nigeria has led to growing shifts in temperature, rainfall, storms, and sea levels. These climatic challenges, left unaddressed, had thrown already stressed resources such as land and water into even

⁶⁶ S. I. Odoh and Chilaka Francis Chigozie, "Climate Change and Conflict in Nigeria: A Theoretical and Empirical Examination of the Worsening Incidence of Conflict between Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers in Northern Nigeria," *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 2, no. 1 (2012): 112.

⁶⁷ I. F. Ezeonwuka and Austine Uchekukwu Igwe, "Emerging Challenges in Nigeria's National Security in the Twenty-First Century: The Fulani Herdsmen's Menace," *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 5 (2016): 205.

shorter supply.⁶⁸ When pastoralists move into Taraba State in search of fresh grass for their cattle they often clash with agriculturalists whose crops are often eaten (and destroyed) by the cattle.

The Catholic Church in Taraba often tries to resolve the conflicts amicably. The Catholic tradition favors mediation as a conflict resolution strategy: the divine is mediated in and through the human.⁶⁹ In this light, cordial relationship between cultures and religions paves way for a harmonious living among people of other religions, faith and nationalities thereby emphasizing the respect for the rights of others, what they believe and what they represent.⁷⁰ The intervention of the Catholic bishops has been strengthened by the call for action from the popes, John Paul II and most recently Benedict XVI. In solidarity with the efforts of the bishops on the continent of Africa, and within specific limits of the borders of the continent. There has been calls by the synod fathers on the people of the continent to a sense of fellowship which goes beyond the limits of one's family, tribe or ethnic group is a truly, deeply-grounded value in African societies. Along with solidarity, it serves as the basis of conduct which, in extreme cases, has led to the death of many people who refused to take part in the violence done by their group against others or who protected and defended people who were to be killed by members of their group.⁷¹ The peoples of Africa respect the life which is conceived and born. They rejoice in this life. They reject the idea that it can be destroyed, even when the so-called 'progressive civilizations' would like to lead them in this direction. And practices

⁶⁸ Ezeonwuka and Igwe, "Emerging Challenges in Nigeria's National Security," 117.

⁶⁹ Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891- Present*, 22.

⁷⁰ Isidore Nwanaju, "The Contribution of Ecclesia in Africa and Africae Munus to Dialogue with Muslims in Nigeria," *Historical Research Letter* 34 (2016): 119.

⁷¹ Synod of Bishops, "II Special Assembly for Africa: Instrumentum Laboris, no. 38" in *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2009).

hostile to life are imposed on them by means of economic systems which serve the selfishness of the rich. Africans show their respect for human life until its natural end, and keep elderly parents and relatives within the family. African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is hoped that Africa preserves this priceless cultural heritage and never succumbs to the temptation of individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions.⁷² In the words of Pope John Paul II “I feel it my duty to express heartfelt thanks to the Church in Africa for the role which it has played over the years as a promoter of peace and reconciliation in many situations of conflict, political turmoil and civil war.”⁷³

However, the pontiff, John Paul II in his encyclical ‘ecclesia in Africa’ notes specifically that the various forms of division need to be healed through honest dialogue. It has been rightly noted that, within the borders left behind by the colonial powers, the co-existence of ethnic groups with different traditions, languages, and even religions often meets obstacles arising from serious mutual hostility.⁷⁴ ‘Tribal oppositions at times endanger if not peace, at least the pursuit of the common good of the society. They also create difficulties for the life of the Churches and the acceptance of Pastors from other ethnic groups’. This is why the Church in Africa feels challenged by the specific responsibility of healing these divisions. For the same reason this Special Assembly, the synod of bishops for Africa emphasized the importance of ecumenical dialogue with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities,

⁷² John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, sec. 42.

⁷³ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, sec. 45.

⁷⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, sec. 49.

and of dialogue with African traditional religion and Islam. The Fathers also considered the means to be used to achieve this goal.⁷⁵

Overview of the Work

Chapter one, this chapter introduces the challenges of social violence across contemporary Nigeria by examining the impact of the ethnic and religious crisis that has led to so many ruptures in Nigeria, particularly the northeastern state of Taraba. The reality of ruptured relationships, the role of the church in rebuilding these relationships and the need for reconciliation are underscored. Similar situations of violence and conflicts in the northeastern part of Nigeria, particularly Taraba state, will be described. Although it may be fundamentally characterized as an ethnic and religious conflict, the interreligious dimension exacerbates the situation. Recent papal pronouncements, including papal trips across Africa, the documents of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, and significant efforts by theologians and other thought leaders offer critical resources and highlight how pressing these violent conflicts truly are. Specific cases of the work of the church in reconciliation will be described to understand how these three categories work in concrete contexts.

Chapter 2 is the first of two methodologically oriented chapters. It begins by describing the see, judge, and act approach. This chapter proposes a method of practical theological reflection that builds on three categories based on Metz's method in order to provide an approach to the "judging" portion of the work that is of sufficient theological richness while engaging both African tradition and Catholic theological wisdom. Such an approach is designed to offer ways of understanding the sufferings of the victims of ethno religious conflicts in Taraba State. Metz's categorical approach helped spark a new understanding of political theology in

⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, sec. 49.

Europe and North America and influenced the growth of liberation theology in Latin America and beyond. In Africa, inculturation theology was growing, but all too often substantiating an essentializing approach to an understanding of culture in the process. Adopting a categorical approach offers a means of capturing the dynamics of action, something so critical for practical theological reflection. By adopting Johann Baptist Metz's approach as a hermeneutical and phenomenological approach to method, the research offers a phenomenological approach that starts with the experiences and understandings of Africans themselves and Nigerians in particular. The three categories of relationship, narrative, and community are offered to engage the gap between magisterial teaching and everyday experience of the people. Interrogating human experience in the midst of pastoral challenges leads to sound praxis.

This notion of praxis builds on the concept of *perichoresis* found in the very life of God who is Trinity, Love-in-Action. Building on this theological understanding of God as relationship and communion, culture and experience, tradition and scripture are seen as constantly at interplay with the categories of relationships, narratives, and community. These are in dynamic relationship with each other. Thus, the three categories introduced here for theological reflection and explored following Metz's approach, interact in shared praxis. By appropriating and linking these three categories with traditional African ways of knowing, meaningful action and sharing may be established. Social violence, in particular ethnic and religious crises affect relations on many fronts especially from lived experience, common culture and faith. Through the critical examination of relationships, narratives from these disrupted communities in the northeastern Taraba state of Nigeria will offer reflection on concrete actions to address relations that have been disrupted by violence as they help to build new relationships.

Chapter 3. This chapter opens the last of the three parts of the see-judge-act method. It will explore in depth the understanding of the situation in Taraba state, as well as the general situation of interreligious violence in Nigeria and beyond. This chapter will also bring a deeper consideration of the impact of violence, interpersonal and structural. The dialogue partner throughout this portion of the work will be contemporary social science, whether in terms of analysis of the peoples involved in Taraba state and similar conflicts, or in light of social psychological dimensions of violence and long term stress resulting from violence. This chapter will draw from the social sciences and other relevant works from inter-disciplinary sources to critically situate the understanding of communities caught in social violence.

Social violence disrupts on multiple levels. This chapter will “see” the situation in all its depth, so as to provide the deep gaze needed to enter into the “judging” work represented by the three categories inspired by Metz’s theological method. Each of those three chapters to follow will explore one of the three categories identified as central for theological reflection on this topic in an African context, employing the wisdom of both Catholic Christian theological tradition and African philosophical, social, and cultural tradition. Both theology and cultural insight together will contribute to the new praxis proposed in the final chapter, which will focus on the “act” dimension of “see-judge-act.” That final chapter will show how these categories and the deep theological reflection they make possible, in turn promises to shape pastoral action in particularly powerful ways.

Chapter 4 is the first of the three chapters oriented around the “judge” component of “see-judge-act.” This chapter, as with the following two, takes one of the three categories central to theological reflection on violence in an African context, applying an approach first modeled by Metz. The focus of this first of the three

“judging” chapters will be to show how identity and experience are shaped by relationships understood in the light of scripture and tradition. God's self-revelation can only be in relationship since God reveals God self as a Trinitarian community of persons. The experience of the Eucharist further reveals a profound sense of relationship. The recent synods of bishops⁷⁶ speak in terms of relationships and metaphors of relationship -- familial, Trinitarian, and communal. African culture builds on relationship. In Nigeria and elsewhere on the continent, relationship is synonymous with life itself. The power of everyday relationships as presented in proverbs, reverence for ancestors, and respect for elders, all point to the strength of African relationships and signals an African practical theology in relationships. The Synod of Bishops' Second Special Assembly for Africa decried the situation of poor relations among followers of Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions, citing distrust and rivalries among these groups. Mistrust on all sides hinders peaceful dialogue and mutual understanding.⁷⁷

Chapter 5 explores narratives, another critical category in the theological reflection on violence in Nigeria and the “dialogue of life” as a Catholic response. Africans are storytellers par excellence. Stories play a critical role in framing and reproducing African culture. The rich oral tradition is central to the dynamism of African culture and social relationships. These stories are rich in proverbs, idioms, and sayings. They reflect the lived wisdom of the people in everyday life. The African approach to story reflects something similar in the Christian scriptures as well as in

⁷⁶ Pope Francis recently called a Synod of Bishops on the topic: The Vocation and Mission of the family in the church and in the contemporary world, at the Vatican in Rome. This was the fourteen ordinary general assembly of the Synod of Catholic Bishops held from October 4-25, 2015.

⁷⁷ Synod of Bishops, “II Special Assembly for Africa: Instrumentum Laboris,” in *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2009).

hagiography, conversion accounts, and other stories of believers, catechists, and leaders at all levels. Such stories of the everyday experience of relationship among Catholics at the grassroots promote the dialogue of life. An example is Pope Benedict's use of a biological metaphor to capture the mood of the church in Africa. As the pontiff put it: "A precious treasure is to be found in the soul of Africa, where I perceive a 'spiritual lung' for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope."⁷⁸ This spiritual lung lives and breathes through stories of life, of survival, resilience, and flourishing.

Chapter 6 examines the African understanding of community, which itself builds on narratives and relationships. Ultimately, the understanding of community also shapes everyday ecclesiology. It correlates with stories of God's people building up the church. Scripture and tradition, the Acts of the Apostles and ecclesiology, reveal such a connectedness. Throughout this chapter, as with the two preceding ones, magisterial teaching on social justice and interreligious dialogue will be presented as a critical resource for the Catholic Church in Africa as it faces situations of social violence.

Chapter 7 will correspond to the "act" portion of the "see, judge, act" approach. While it is hard to predict the exact shape or direction this concluding chapter will take until the others are developed, it will likely propose a dialogue that offers a distinctively African practical theological reflection flowing from the three categories explored in the preceding chapters. These categories taken together confirm the value of connecting magisterial teaching regarding a "dialogue of life," developed in the context of interreligious dialogue, with magisterial social teaching. As such, African experience grounded in a categorical approach to theological

⁷⁸ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, sec. 13.

reflection, together with this insight linking two sources of Catholic magisterial teaching, will likely be presented as a response to contemporary social violence in Africa, particularly that which is faced in Taraba state, Nigeria. As such, the “dialogue of life” may be understood as critically engaging everyday life and building on wisdom found in cultural knowledge and the Christian tradition. It builds on the local African contextual experience of the categories of relationship, narrative, and community. By emphasizing a dynamic shared praxis, an appropriate pastoral response will be proposed. Magisterial teaching brought together in this way would further point to the rich patrimony of revered religious texts and embedded spiritual wisdom. These sources cannot be ignored since they possess the wisdom of millennia as to how people might conduct their lives and pay respect to their dead.⁷⁹

Today, religion is increasingly seen as dividing people as much as uniting them. Social violence stems from religious divides and religiously based justifications, but response to such violence and to building interreligious dialogue also comes from religious sources. The Catholic Church has much to offer in responding to religious violence. Its channels include diocesan level Justice, Peace and Development commissions that in turn are linked to international commissions. It has networks of parishes and schools everywhere. Within traditional African society and culture, religiously rooted occasions such as rites of passages and community celebrations are points of contacts where a concrete interplay of relationships, narratives, and community are further cemented and refined. Within grassroots religious experience, these resources can serve those who are the first casualties of social violence. This dialogue of life that lifts up the experience of ordinary people

⁷⁹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

will be correlated theologically in this chapter so as to give the conclusion that much more depth and meaning.

Chapter Three: A Long Loving Gaze

Introduction

This chapter closes the first (the see aspect) of the three parts of the see-judge-act method. It explores in depth the situation in Taraba, connecting with the general situation of interreligious violence in Nigeria and beyond. It also brings a deeper consideration of the impact of violence on both interpersonal and structural levels. The dialogue partner throughout this portion of the work is contemporary social science, whether in terms of analysis of the peoples involved in Taraba and similar conflicts, or in light of social psychological dimensions of violence and long term stress resulting from violence. The work draws from the social sciences and other relevant works from inter-disciplinary sources to critically situate the understanding of communities caught in social violence. This chapter specifically examines the challenges of ethno-religious conflicts in Taraba, traces their root causes and draws out the religious dimensions of the conflicts to see how Catholic theology will engage the warring parties in a dialogue of life.

Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Taraba State

Ethno-religious conflicts in Taraba seem to defy resolutions and seem unending because they are intractable conflicts.¹ This section of the work discusses these conflicts which are not without cost to the people of Taraba state. This background leads one to an understanding of the realities that shape social tensions and their outcomes for governance in Nigeria and the Taraba context in particular.

¹ Christian Chukwuebuka Ezeibe, "Inter-Religious Conflicts and Crisis of Development in Nigeria: Who Benefits?" *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences* 1, no (2009): 113.

Nature of the Conflicts/Violence

Conflicts in Taraba have been very complex with multifaceted causes often resulting into violent clashes. There are three notable conflicts that keep on recurring in Taraba namely (1) Wukari crisis, (2) Takum/ Ussa crisis and (3) the Fulani crisis. These conflicts take on different forms among the people; however, this study focuses on the third, the Fulani crisis which manifests itself in the clash between the pastoralists (Fulani people) and the agriculturalists (farming groups). Wukari is indeed a hotbed for conflicts in Taraba State. For instance, fourteen violent conflicts took place between 1991 and July 13, 2013 in Wukari alone. Wukari, a town located in the southern part of Taraba State is the headquarters of the Wukari Local Government Area (an administrative council) and doubles as the headquarters of the Jukun people who claim ownership of the land.² The Jukun, who are the dominant group often engage in communal clashes with the Tiv who are the second largest ethnic group, “Three major factors have been used to explain the Tiv-Jukun ethnic conflict. These are the land issue, the political factor and the indigene-settler question.”³ Regarding land use, both Jukun and Tiv people are farmers and therefore, struggle to acquire the most fertile parts of the land. More so, more than 80% of the Tiv people are farmers which explain how valuable land is to them and hence would easily clash with whoever is in their way. As per political factor in these conflicts, both the Jukun and Tiv people often want to control power most especially when it comes to elections. Political interests could build on the already existing tension to

² Charles Alfred, Andeshi Christopher Ale and Daniel Wununyatu, “War Economy of Ethno-Religious Crises: a Study of the Wukari Crises of Taraba State, Nigeria,” *International Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 25.

³ Moses T. Aluaigba, “The Tiv-Jukun Ethnic Conflict and the Citizenship Question in Nigeria,” Aminu Kano Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Bayero University, Kano, 5, http://www.ifra-nigeria.org/IMG/pdf/Moses_T-_ALUAIGBA_-_The_Tiv-Jukun_Ethnic_Conflict_and_the_Citizenship_Question_in_Nigeria.pdf.

breakdown the fragile peace. Lastly, the concept of indigene-settler calls to question the debatable issue of citizenship in Nigeria. The Jukun claim ancestral ownership and tag the Tiv and other groups living in the area as non-indigenes, settlers, or migrants. The Tiv and other groups in trying to enforce their rights as Nigerian citizens who are free to settle in any part of the country end up in violent clash with the Jukun.⁴

The Takum/Ussa conflicts are similar to what happens in Wukari and its environs. Takum and Ussa are two local government areas in the eastern part of Taraba. Takum Local Government Area is inhabited by the Tiv, Chamba, Jukun and Kuteb tribes, and Ussa Local Government Area though has Tiv, Chamba and Jukun, but it is predominantly occupied by the Kuteb people. According to Ali and his colleagues, the conflicts in these two local government areas are interconnected and have both remote and immediate causes. Principal among the causative factors are “chieftaincy tussle, mutual feeling of political domination and other historical factors ...[are] the remote causes while the adjustment of the boundary between Takum and Ussa Local Government Areas (LGAs) ...[is] attributed to the immediate cause of the 1997 to 1999 conflict.”⁵ These crises often revolve around land ownership and the indigene-settler problem. Their political leaders or elites are to blame for spreading “ethnic sentiments to secure local, state and federal government appointments. The manipulations of people along ethnic and religious differences create suspicion and with that, people are unable to face their common adversaries of poverty and underdevelopment.”⁶ The Fulani conflict is the focus of this study. The Fulani people

⁴ Aluaigba, *The Tiv-Jukun Ethnic Conflict and the Citizenship Question in Nigeria*, 1-19.

⁵ Andesikuteb Yakubu Ali, Mercy John Abah, Aishetu Freda Onum, Uwem Edem Johnson and Elizabeth Mayokun Iwalaiye, “An Examination of the Causes of Conflicts in Takum and Ussa Local Government Areas of Taraba State, Nigeria,” *African Journal of Science and Research* 4, no.2 (2015): 20.

⁶ Ali et al., *An Examination of the Causes of Conflicts in Takum and Ussa*, 20.

are mostly pastoralists who graze their cattle from the northern part of Nigeria down to the southern part of the country in search of fresh grass for their cattle. Their main habitat in the far extreme north of Nigeria is suffering from desert encroachment. However, whenever they take their cattle through the fields and farmlands the cattle eat and destroy the farms of local inhabitants of Taraba. This causes much violence. This crisis is widespread and of greater magnitude than the two previous ones because it involves the whole state. This can be equated to wider social violence.

To understand social control which is behind structural violence that is instrumental to the rise of interreligious and ethnic violence, some critical clarifications must be made. Arendt redefines violence from an instrumental perspective and distinguishes power, authority, force and violence. Arendt defines power as something positive: the human capability to act in harmony. Power happens when people meet and act together in fruitful co-operation. Authority on the hand is the capacity to influence a people which often arise from the power that one holds. Violence occurs when power is threatened: it functions as an instrument to maintain or enhance power.⁷

Violence in Taraba rotates between two groups, the pastoralists and the agriculturalists. These two groups are broadly classified as “herders” and “farmers” respectively. The term "herder" is often used to mean pastoralists, those who keep herds, animals and who define themselves and are defined by others as pastoralists. But the term is also used to refer to the person in charge of the activity of herding, that is, the person taking the animals to pasture. A similar distinction can be made for "farmer," known as agriculturalists, and are those who live primarily off farming,

⁷ Jan Willem Van Henten “Religion, Bible and Violence,” in *Coping with Violence in the New Testament*, eds. Pieter G. R de Viller and Jan willem Van Henten (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), 6.

and/or are those responsible for cultivating a particular plot of land. The concepts of herders and farmers represent two systemic thoughts: the former refers to people associated with a particular production and socio-cultural system, the later refers to people involved in a specific economic activity at a particular time and place.⁸

The herders and farmers are often locked in the conflict of claiming rights over land. In examining the question of land rights, the farmers are considered as the landed group, that is, those who claim ownership over the land and exert political control over it. On the other hand, the pastoralists or herders are regarded as the landless group, those who do not own the land they use and settle on.⁹ When land is scarce or its access is highly contested, the pastoralists, who constitute the landless and powerless group, are greatly disadvantaged.¹⁰ The cattle-based pastoralism of the Fulani has thus been the most significant focus of herder/farmer conflict in Nigeria. For a long period, the Fulani people were confined to the edge of the desert. During the twentieth century, Fulani herders began to migrate through and settle in whole zones that were previously inaccessible to pastoralists, bringing them into contact with previously unknown peoples, cultures and production systems. The consequences of this were a raft of untested interactions between all parties and considerable space for misunderstandings and conflict.¹¹ Among the reasons adduced for misunderstanding and constant clash of farmer-pastoralist conflict in the region

⁸ Mark Moritz, "Changing Contexts and Dynamics of Farmer-Herder Conflicts across West Africa," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines* 40, no. 1 (2006): 22-23.

⁹ Abba Gana Shettima and Usman A. Tar, "Famer Pastoralist Conflicts in West Africa: Exploring the Cause and Consequence," *Information, Society and Justice* 1, no. 2 (June, 2008): 175.

¹⁰ Shettima and Tar, *Farmer Pastoralist Conflicts in West Africa*, 176.

¹¹ Chilaka Francis Chigozie, "Climate Change and Conflict in Nigeria: A Theoretical and Empirical Examination of the Worsening Incidence of Conflict between Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers in Northern Nigeria," *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (OMAN Chapter)* 2, no. 1 (2012): 113.

includes the expansion of agricultural cultivation into grazing areas. Other factors are damage to crops by herds as well as disappearing passages to grazing areas and watering points.¹²

Farmer/herder differences are not only seen as resources conflict but are also sometimes represented as ethnic conflict involving the two groups. Since herder and farmer groups have very different values, customs, physical and cultural characteristics, disputes between them are frequently characterized as ethnic conflict.¹³ Again, considering the asymmetrical nature of power relations between farmers and pastoralists in the contemporary period, the pastoralist group in Nigeria feels that conflict maybe the only viable means of empowering them as a disempowered group, and in this way addressing injustice in the distribution of the scarce resource of land.¹⁴

History records that conflict between herders and farmers date back to the dawn of civilization. Herodotus writing in the fourth century BC, in Ancient Greece described Scythian nomadic depredation. Before then, there were earlier conflicts recorded in ancient Mesopotamia. The endless struggles between the nomadic Bedouin and the fellahin (or peasants) of Arab societies have shaped the history of the Mideast.¹⁵ The essential problem is that pastoralists require access to relatively large areas of land and tend to move their herds according to the seasons, ecology and weather changes. Such activities also inevitably mean that they and sedentary agriculturalists come into competition over land and water. It is this competition that

¹² Shettima and Tar, *Farmer Pastoralist Conflicts in West Africa*, 177.

¹³ Albert Ofuoku U and Benjamin I. Isife, "Causes, Effects and Resolution of Farmers-Nomadic Cattle Herders Conflict in Delta state, Nigeria," *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (2009): 48.

¹⁴ Shettima and Tar, *Famer Pastoralist Conflicts in West Africa*, 179.

¹⁵ Christopher K. Butler and Scott Gates, "Communal Violence and Property Rights," Lecture, 'Poverty and Peace Program' of the Research Council of Norway, August 2010, 2.

serves as the basis of armed violence between different communities.¹⁶ Pastoralists generally do not own the land and only have usufruct rights over landed resources such as grasses, trees and water. In practice, however, pastoralists' usufruct rights over land and landed resources only seem secure as long as there are no agricultural claims.

Pastoral rights are generally trumped by agricultural rights, which are a reflection of the contemporary power balance between farmers and herders in national laws, policies, and governments.¹⁷ Increasing denial of pastoralists' access to a critical resources such as grazing land and paths, leads to a general feeling of being marginalized and helplessness. As a result, this has become a worrisome development and frequently leads to trouble in Taraba. The extent of pastoral political powerlessness is manifested in landlessness among pastoralists in Taraba. In recent times, the pastoralists have been increasingly pushing back with violence in different parts of the country, which has led to an unprecedented upsurge in violence more than ever experienced in Nigerian history.

Depth of the Conflict

In Taraba, a sense of helplessness pervades the pastoralists and they are left to find ways of preserving their livelihood and security. They believe they are unable to help themselves, because they are powerless as regards issues of grazing routes (paths). From the psychological point of view, this is a traumatic experience that may compound their helplessness. According to behavioral psychology of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, to understand this helplessness requires interrogating and discerning the depth with which it affects the happiness of the pastoralists in

¹⁶ Butler and Gates, *Communal Violence and Property Rights*, 2.

¹⁷ Moritz, *Changing Contexts and Dynamics*, 22-23.

Taraba State.¹⁸ Happiness is derived from fulfilling the high ranking needs of self transcendence and actualization. Very few people actually fulfill these needs.

However, meeting these needs is pivotal for the well being of the pastoralists in Taraba. A situation where all the routes (paths) to grazing are blocked and restrictions are placed with fines for trespassing leaves the pastoralists to yearly look for ways to navigate this ever changing path for grazing their cattle.¹⁹

Today, the issue of creating grazing reserves has become more divisive than ever in Nigeria. The farmers are afraid that cattle of the pastoralists will destroy their crops as it is the case when they are allowed access to the farmlands. The pastoralists on the other hand are afraid that their cattle would die from starvation and drought if not allowed to move downward from the north to the south in search of fresh grass. There is a conflict of interest on both sides which could serve as an opportunity for robust conversation that would ensure a dialogue of life between these people. Sadly, the farmers see this as a way of taking their land without proper compensation while putting in place, a rigorous process of acquiring compensations by law. For the farmers, this brings about fear, anxiety and incites provocations. The pastoralists on the other hand, envision a solution to the problem because creating a grazing route will deal with their pain and helplessness. For peace to reign in Taraba, and in fact,

¹⁸ Soren Ventegodt, Joav Merrick and Niels Jorgen Andersen, "Quality of Life Theory III. Maslow Revisited," *The Scientific World Journal* 3 (2003): 1052.

¹⁹ The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria under Chapter IV, Section 41 (1), "Every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria or refused entry or exit there from"? Section 42 (1) adds that, "A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person – (a) be subjected either expressly by, or in practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religious or political opinions are not made subjects..." See section 41(1), section 42(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Nigeria, both pastoralists and farmers must agree that they would give dialogue a chance believing that it will work for the benefit all. Any meaningful dialogue must begin with tracing the roots of a conflict or violence.²⁰

Roots of Conflict and Violence

As already mentioned, the causes for the ethno-religious conflicts in Taraba State are complex. There are both remote and immediate causes. In order to sift through that, this section of the study lays out the historical background to the crisis, examines how it implicates Christianity and Islam in continuous tension, and then raises the hotly debated issue of grazing sites.

Historical Background

Crises in Taraba have both remote and immediate causes. Ali and colleagues examined the causes of conflicts in Takum and Ussa Local Government Areas of Taraba State and identified poverty, struggle over local chieftaincy offices (community leadership/politics), boundary adjustment, and youth unemployment among other related factors as the remote causes.²¹ Among these remote factors are poverty and unemployment. In their study, Ali and his colleagues observed that “37.3% and 39.4% [of research respondents] respectively in Takum and Ussa Local Government Areas claimed that apart from other causes of the crisis, high poverty rates in both local government areas contributed immensely to the crisis.”²² Due to the poverty level, the youth are idle without meaningful engagement. At least, during

²⁰ In the recent times, Nigeria has suffered increased in religious and ethnic violence. This could be a by product of accumulated deprivation, marginalization, anger, destruction and frustrations of the past. Kwala and Hutchison note that ‘the ethnic or religious dimensions of the conflict have subsequently been misconstrued as the primary driver of violence when, in fact, disenfranchisement, inequality, and other practical fears are the root causes’. Oluwayemisi Obashoro-John, “Personal and Communal Relationships: Implications for Ethno Religious Violence,” *International Journal for Social Science and Education* 2, no. 4 (2012): 600.

²¹ Ali et al., *An Examination of the Causes of Conflicts in Takum and Ussa*, 20-23.

²² Ali et al., *An Examination of the Causes of Conflicts in Takum and Ussa*, 23.

times of crises, the youth are self employed and they do benefit from the spoils of the crises that momentarily alleviate their poverty. Besides, in inter-tribal clashes, the youth are at times recruited “as war executors by their communities ... for a stipend,”²³ and studies have shown that 30% of people in Takum and 35% in Ussa Local Government Areas agree with this assertion.

The conflict which is mainly between pastoralist (mostly Muslim Fulani ethnic group) and agriculturalist (mostly Christian Tiv, Jukun, and Kuteb ethnic groups) demonstrates the effects of ethnic violence in the name of religion and a lack of tolerance amongst the Fulani, Tiv, Jukun and Kuteb people. The Fulani pastoralists are mostly Muslim and the Tiv, Jukun and Kuteb agriculturalists are substantially Christian. This makes it easier for the people to turn every crisis into a Christian-Muslim conflict. After raid on villages and farms of these agricultural communities, by the pastoralists, their lands are redistributed among collaborating landlords who had acted as middle men in the crisis. The agriculturalists that unarmed flee the land for safety, and return when relative peace ensues. The pastoralists who are often well armed share out the seized land of the agriculturalists and on their return from their displaced settlements where they had taken refuge they have to renegotiate their land from clan heads and district chiefs who had sold out their lands and profited from it. This raises practical questions in favor of ethnic relations on many fronts between Christians and Muslims, settlers and indigenous or pastoralists and agriculturalists, access to land and power. Many scholars are united in the position that the key to prevention and resolution of these conflicts and violence is a greater understanding of its changing contexts and dynamics.²⁴ The nature of the violence is often complex.

²³ Ali et al., *An Examination of the Causes of Conflicts in Takum and Ussa*, 23.

²⁴ Moritz, *Changing Contexts and Dynamics*, 29.

In general, a critical look at north eastern Nigeria, especially Taraba suggests that there are many conflicts, which are environmentally induced. These are conflicts over grazing land, over cattle, over water points and over cultivable land. While there are conflicts over grazing land and over cattle amongst pastoral people, there are also conflicts over cultivable land amongst peasant farmers within the same ethnic groups and also between ethnic groups. Such conflicts amongst pastoralists are common and widespread in Nigeria.²⁵ At the same time, the violence that results from the conflict between the pastoralists and agriculturalists is also a social conflict. Since, at each point of the conflict, the result has been mass movement of internally displaced persons, disruption of the social, cultural and political fabrics of the communities which include massive loss of lives. Governance in these areas has been compromised and the securities of lives and properties are completely eliminated. By critically interrogating the world of the agriculturalist and pastoralist, it will serve as an aid to the perception of intra- and inter-religious hatred and violence. The best place to begin is the debatable issue of grazing rights between the Muslim pastoralists and the Christian agriculturalists.

Grazing Areas and Cattle Ranches

One of the most contentious issues in this ongoing crisis is the provision for cattle grazing areas and ranches. The federal government wants to create grazing areas and ranches to reduce the rate of communal crisis between the pastoralists and farmers. The aim is to restrict pastoralists and their cattle to designated areas with water and fresh grass so that contact with farmers will be reduced. The federal

²⁵ Emeka E. Obioha, "Climate Change, Population Drift and Violent Conflict over Land Resources in North Eastern Nigeria," *Journal of Humanities and Ecology* 23, no. 4 (2008): 317.

government argues that this would bring lasting peace.²⁶ In a *Vanguard* Newspaper report of March 28, 2016, farmers in Taraba think otherwise on the proposed cattle grazing areas and ranches. From the look of things, this would also be a problematic and difficult exercise:

The largely agrarian Christian communities maintain that the Muslim Fulani herdsmen are engaged in a prolonged battle to gobble up land from the areas of so-called indigenous people. Fulani leaders counter their people face discrimination and are deprived of basic rights, including access to land, education and political office, despite having lived in the area for generations.²⁷

The farmers therefore argue that the creation of grazing areas in Taraba will end up causing more trouble because the government would have to confiscate people's lands for grazing. For an agrarian community land is very much valuable because their livelihood depends on it. Taking away land for grazing paths will result to greater chaos. In an editorial, the *Guardian* newspaper noted that,

Suffice to say that to take land from one people and give to another is a recipe for chaos. Land does not belong to government per se, but it is held in trust for the people. Over the ongoing crisis of herdsmen, the present government needs to tread softly and listen to the voice of reason to avoid a crisis that may well be Nigeria's greatest undoing.²⁸

More tensions and ill feelings will be created between the pastoralists and the farmers leading to heightened animosity. In another release, *Vanguard* Newspaper reported

²⁶ Alexandra Gyang, "Creation of Grazing Areas will Cause More Crisis – Taraba Govt," *Vanguard*, March 28, 2016, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/03/creation-grazing-areas-will-cause-crisis/>.

²⁷ Gyang, *Creation of Grazing Areas will Cause More Crisis*.

²⁸ Editorial, "Nigeria, Death and the Herdsmen," *The Guardian*, December 11, 2016, <http://guardian.ng/opinion/nigeria-death-and-the-herdsmen/>.

story on the crisis between the pastoralists and farmers, the paper reports the unhappiness of the farmers over the proposed confiscation of their land which portends danger. A local was quoted as saying, “It will be so difficult to create grazing areas because no farmer here will like to give out his land which is hereditary for his grand children for grazing, it will also take serious compassion if the federal government wants to be just.”²⁹ Already unverified reports indicate that the Taraba State government is contesting its inclusion in a proposed land grazing bill recently announced by the minister for agriculture. Contrary to that, Taraba State denies it had agreed to grazing land proposal with some states of the federation. This shows how contentious these issues of grazing rights versus land ownership may appear to be.

Land Use Rights

The acquisition and usage of land in Taraba State, and in fact, in the northern part of Nigeria is contentious. It is mixed at times with politics and the struggle for religious domination. According to Adamu and Ben, the issue of domination in Taraba

...can be seen at three levels, the first level is domination through traditional institutions, the second level is domination through political control and the third level is domination through violence, in this case, the use of Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen to displace and dispossess indigenous Christian communities of their land and properties.³⁰

This third level is the immediate and major concern here. The fact that it borders on land remains at the heart of the matter in Taraba. Land remains a gift of nature to humanity and the most important factor of production. It can be said that “land is the

²⁹ “Fulani Herders Kill 15 in Taraba Police,” *Vanguard*, April 13, 2016, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/04/fulani-herders-kill-15-taraba-police/>.

³⁰ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 54.

platform of all human activities economic, social, spiritual or recreation.”³¹ It explains why both pastoralists and agriculturalists are keenly interested in its use. However, both differ on the principles of land use and are usually in competition over its use. It stems from a shaky interpretation of the law, a faulty understanding and implementation of the use of land. Faulty land transfers especially when done through private conveyance method also contribute to land dispute. The process of land acquisition when faulty would result in complicating land ownership. The common form of acquisition of land is either by purchase, leasing, adverse possession, inheritance or donation.³² In Taraba, pastoralists and agriculturalists are quick to refer to an ordinance that goes back to the colonial period, the 1916 ordinance. In the 1916 Ordinance that was subsequently amended and substantially reenacted to the Land Tenure Law of 1962, the law declared certain lands in northern Nigeria as "native lands" and vested the management and control of these lands in the minister (later commissioner) for lands and survey to administer such lands for the use and common benefit of the natives.³³ What is particularly interesting is that Section 6 of the 1962 law empowered the minister to grant rights of occupancy to natives. The consent and approval of the minister was also required for the occupation and enjoyment of land rights by non-natives. Under this law, a non-native was defined as a person whose father was not a member of any tribe indigenous to northern Nigeria.³⁴ Later, the Land Use Act of 1978 granted equal rights and opportunities to Nigerians to live in any part

³¹ E. D. Oruonye, “The Socio-economic Impact of Land Resource Conflict in Taraba State: A Case Study of Kona – Minda Crisis in Northern Taraba,” *International Journal of Environmental Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2012): 46.

³² Saidu Ibrahim Jahun, “The Roles and the Challenges of Traditional Rulers in Land Conflicts and Management in Nigeria – a Case Study of Bauchi State in Nigeria,” Lecture, FIG Working Week, Bulgaria, May 17-21, 2015, 8.

³³ P. Ehi Oshio, “The Indigenous Land Tenure and Nationalization of Land in Nigeria,” *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 10, no. 1(1990): 45-46.

³⁴ Oshio, *The Indigenous Land Tenure and Nationalization*, 46.

of the country un-deterred and regards all citizens as Nigerians and not Natives, unlike the previous Land Tenure Act of 1962 that did not spell this out. According to this law, the federal government has the power to adjust the boundaries between cattle routes, range lands and farmlands accordingly and envisage co-existence of various groups.³⁵

However, the main fault of the Land Use Act of 1978 was that it transferred title and ownership of land from individuals and communities to the governors who hold the land in trust but many of whom have been known to have abused the power and privileges conferred on them by the Act. It also made acquisition of land by individuals and corporate bodies for commercial and economic development purposes extremely difficult.³⁶ Since it falls within the confines of government to survey and map out land, the process is delayed and very little has been done, a minimal percentage of the whole landmass has been registered. This is a major concern. This may explain why the pursuit of power and domination remains a strong desire because of the influence it exerts on the question of land and control by the governor and government. This leaves the poor farmers both pastoralists and agriculturalists to navigate this difficult terrain of land tenure rights, since they operate on it and require it for their basic sustenance but they have no substantial capital and legal rights to own the lands.

Power and Religion

Taraba is a case in point where the clash between pastoralists and agriculturalists frequently assumes the banner of religious conflicts. But the real issues are completely mislabeled by those in power with a position to handle the conflicts

³⁵ Muhammed Ibrahim, Abdurrahman Belel Ismaila and Umar Muhammed Bibi, "An Assessment of Farmer-Pastoralist conflict in Nigeria using GIS," *International Journal of Engineering Science Invention* 4, no. 7 (2015): 25.

³⁶ Oruonye, *The Socio-economic Impact of Land*, 46.

instead they have hidden intentions. Investigation reveals that “within government circles and among policymakers, [the general understanding is that] the ongoing atrocities committed against indigenous Christian farmers by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen are due to contestation over land and environmental resources.”³⁷ However, studies have shown this position to be heavily flawed. Recent findings demonstrate that the atrocities committed by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen in Taraba are targeted at indigenous Christian farmers, particularly in central and southern Taraba. In these areas, it is Christians that are killed and displaced, their land and farms taken over, their shops burnt and businesses destroyed.³⁸ With the spate of the massive destruction of properties of Christians, one may suspect a hidden motive in these crises quite apart from struggle over land. Underlying these crises is control and access to a critical resource, which is power. There is underneath, the feeling of a disbalance of power and helplessness that exists among pastoralists. As a result they want to acquire power at all cost: “it would seem that the Muslims of Northern Nigeria, even where they are not in majority, have the political deftness, strong will and the means to clinch power. Sometimes, it is by fate {chance}, like we now see in Taraba, a mainly Christian state.”³⁹ The real challenge for Islam in Taraba is how to fully dominate the state. Political power, the Muslims reason, will avail them of the platform to implement an Islamic agenda with the support of state institutions. As such, capturing political power, and using it to spread Islam became a strategy in the jihad to conquer Taraba.⁴⁰ So, it came as no surprise when as acting governor, Garba

³⁷ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 48.

³⁸ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 51.

³⁹ Luka Binniyat, “The Yakowa/Azazi Tragedy: Northern Christian Governors as Endangered Species,” *Vanguard*, December 23, 2012, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/12/the-yakowaazazi-tragedy-northern-christian-governors-as-endangered-species/>.

⁴⁰ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 58.

Umar, a Muslim denied that the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen were not responsible for attacks against indigenous Christian farmers, alleging that it was the militia of the Jukun ethnic group dressed as Fulani who attacked Tiv ethnic groups. Strategically, this was intended to absolve the Muslim herdsmen of any blame and pitch two Christian majority ethnic groups – Tiv and Jukun – against one another.

In addition, Umar Garba ratified the appointment of a Fulani Muslim as the paramount ruler of Gembu, an indigenous Christian majority town in Taraba. He also put in every effort to ensure that he was sworn in as the executive governor of the state. As executive governor, he would no longer need the approval of Governor Danbaba Suntai, a Christian, to carry out his functions. He would then have obtained the full powers to upgrade the influence of Muslims within political and traditional circles. Umar Garba accused the majority Christians and influential Christian leaders of blocking his confirmation as substantive governor. A security source from the Directorate of State Service (DSS) in Jalingo (capital of Taraba State) disclosed that acting governor Umar Garba had used state funds to assist Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen entering the state to resettle in various parts of Taraba. He assured them of grazing lands as long as they would displace the huge Christian communities of the Southern and Central Senatorial Districts. When asked to explain why acting governor Umar would embark on such an agenda, the source said the state was sharply divided along religious lines and it was very likely this would reflect the voting pattern in the 2015 elections. Considering the numerical strength of the Christians, it would be foolhardy to imagine victory at the polls without displacing the Christians first.⁴¹

⁴¹ The conclusion for many is that there is consequently, a revised explanation for the ongoing violent conflict in Taraba State, based on the evidence collected, leaves no doubt that an Islamic agenda to dominate the only Christian majority state in northeastern Nigeria is being implemented. See Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 62.

The use of religion and ethnicity is exploited to create conflicts and use as ideological cover for a phenomena of power and control that are more complex as seen in the case of Taraba. The fact remains that power struggle or intense political contest is very fundamental in understanding the basis for ethno-religious violence in Nigeria.⁴² In an editorial, the *Guardian* newspapers noted that “Rightly or wrongly, there is already a growing perception of a hidden agenda that borders on territorial conquest and faith imposition. This is not allayed by widespread killing, kidnapping and raping being perpetrated”⁴³ by many during these conflicts. Judging from the above, it is unfair and unjust to define and limit the killing of indigenous Christian farmers in Taraba simply to the issue of environmental degradation and contestation over land. Field evidence indicates that recent killings in Taraba are religiously motivated, with the aim of Muslim elites achieving political gains. This makes the explanation offered by victims of the conflict plausible, namely that it is a crass case of using politics as a decoy for a religious agenda.⁴⁴ Often, when ethno-religious crisis occurs in Taraba it is redirected and misrepresented by the authorities. It is the case that at each point when reference is made to this violence and named as such, it is always those in positions of influence that are determining the outcome of this violence not the farmers themselves. As a church it is important that steps be taken to address this situation because it affects the lives of the people and creates human suffering. This human suffering impedes human flourishing which is what the people desire. That is why this study takes up the issue of the sufferings of Taraba people and

⁴² Jude C. Okafor, Barrister Vincent O. S. Okeke and Ernest Tooche Aniche, "Power Struggle, Political Contest and Ethno-Religious Violence in Nigeria," *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science (NAJOPS)* 3, no. 1 (2012):85.

⁴³ Editorial, "Nigeria, Death and the Herdsmen."

⁴⁴ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 64.

dialogues with Catholic theology to evolve a dialogue of life for the people, which would lead to peaceful co-existence.

Conversation with Theology

Decrying the growing violence in the inner cities, the US Catholic Bishop had this to say: “Our families are torn by violence. Our communities are destroyed by violence. Our faith is tested by violence. We have an obligation to respond.”⁴⁵ It resonates with the cries of Christians caught in ethno religious violence in Taraba. Consequently, the Catholic community brings strong convictions and vital experience which can enrich the national dialogue on how best to overcome the violence that is tearing the state apart.⁴⁶ The Catholic Church in Taraba and Nigeria at large has to take some critical steps and measures to address this concern.

The Catholic Church in Taraba

The Catholic Church in Taraba being one of the largest Christian groups in the state, has also taken the worst hit from constant violence and attacks on Christians. Despite, its predicaments, it has continued to offer help and support on all who are displaced from this continuing violence. Recently, major calls were made for “the catholic church in Nigeria to adopt the same Papal diplomacy, and step it down to the cardinals, bishops, and priests across the dioceses and parishes to ensure that political leaders at national and state levels are engaged in a dialogue to resolve or combat herdsmen terrorism.”⁴⁷ This is a challenge that the bishop of Jalingo in Taraba State,

⁴⁵U.S. Catholic Bishops, “Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action,” *A Pastoral Message of the U.S. Catholic Bishops*, 1994, accessed November 21, 2016, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/violence/confronting-a-culture-of-violence-a-catholic-framework-for-action.cfm>.

⁴⁶ U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Confronting a Culture of Violence*, sec. 1.

⁴⁷ Wilfred Terlumun Uji, "Catholic Church Diplomacy: The Challenge of Fulani Herdsmen Terrorism in Central Nigeria," *Online Journal of Arts, Management & Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2016): 58.

and the neighboring bishops of Gboko in Benue State have taken seriously. As a result one intervention group has gained enormous publicity from the efforts supported by Rev. Fathers and Pastors from Taraba, and it got a boost with the intervention of The Catholic Bishops of Jalingo and Gboko, Most Reverend Charles Hammawa and Most Reverend William Amove Avenya, who are organizing themselves into an intervention group.⁴⁸ The intervention group comprises of Catholic and Protestant clergies. Under the leadership of the bishops they embark on visits to traditional rulers soliciting for joints efforts in bringing an end to this violence. The bishops in soliciting for cooperation from traditional rulers and other stake holders to end the incessant violence say, “in doing this, we must look inward on issues that generate tension and crisis and deal with them. We want to promote peace and we cannot achieve that without your support and cooperation.”⁴⁹ This implies that the work of building peace requires that all parties in these disputes are involved and show some level of commitment.

Similar bodies like the intervention group of the Catholic bishops are beginning to spring up. For instance, in Jalingo, (Taraba state capital), a forum of religious and traditional leaders, mostly from the southern part of Taraba, have been formed to condemn in strong terms frequent clashes between farmers and herders, and other ethno-religious clashes in the state.⁵⁰ The forum insists that government at all levels must draw on their statutory roles to ensure that laws guiding land use are always implemented. Also, it is pressuring the government to expedite action on the

⁴⁸ Justin Tyopusur, “Taraba/Benue Crisis: Catholic Bishops to the Rescue,” *Newsverge*, November 16, 2015, <http://newsverge.com/tarababenu-crisis-catholic-bishops-to-the-rescue/>.

⁴⁹ Tyopusur, “Taraba/Benue Crisis: Catholic Bishops to the Rescue.”

⁵⁰ Ito Daniel Sule, “Nigeria: Forum Wants End to Taraba Crises,” *Daily Trust*, June 14, 2015, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201506152362.html>.

return of the displaced people who fled the crisis from central and southern parts of the state to continue their normal lives.⁵¹

As an institution, the churches have continued to reach out to those affected through provision of food and shelter and other things to alleviate their sufferings. This study suggests that the Christian Association of Nigeria, the pan umbrella of all Christian faith groups in Nigeria should provide the desired platform for dialogue to take place between the state and the church. If this can be utilized, it will go a long way in combating the terrors of Fulani violence in the rural areas.⁵² While many of the initiatives suggested by government bodies have been tested, ethno religious violence has continued in many different parts of the state. This should propel the efforts of the different Christian groups in the state to work toward dialogue of life. This means conversing with Christian theology.

Christian Theology

A critical focus for the church in Taraba is that no adequate organizing framework exists for the analytic account of ethno religious violence. On the other hand, "a consistent language for discussing conflict phenomena can only be provided by a unified theoretical framework."⁵³ A theoretical framework should be able to engage the life experiences of the people. This is extremely significant for theology because "Christian theology should be seen as practical through and through and at its very heart."⁵⁴ This study therefore prioritizes engaging practical theology with the ethno religious violence in Taraba, and by so doing evolve and determine a particular framework that would result into a dialogue of life.

⁵¹ Sule, *Nigeria: Forum Wants End to Taraba Crises*.

⁵² Uji, *Catholic Church Diplomacy*, 58.

⁵³ Stewart Guthrie, "A Cognitive Theory of Religion," *Current Anthropology* 21, no. 2 (1980): 416.

⁵⁴ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 7.

What practical theology seeks to do is to reclaim a certain reintegration of theology into the weave and fabric of human living, in which theology becomes a "practice" or a way of life. This is what makes practical theology difficult to define, as though it were one type of theology as opposed to another type. It resists a certain branding or labeling and makes its appeal to a more integrated theological sensibility that attempts to honor the great learning of theological wisdom with the desire for God and the coming of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.⁵⁵ As a result it delves into the issue of violence by engaging it in theological conversation with new commitment and creativity against a background that ethno religious violence in Taraba continues to defy solutions.

In the document of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, the church recognizes conversing with the life situation of the people. This document puts it this way: "the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."⁵⁶ The church proposes to enter into dialogue with the entire human family about the problems of the world, as a sign of solidarity, respect and affection.⁵⁷ This conversation of the church with the world is pivotal to theology and to a large extent is movement toward heightening the dignity of the human person. The task of a practical theology of dialogue of life in Taraba State would be focused on "seeing the other truly as a person [which] is key to overcoming the many forms of violence that affect and infect us."⁵⁸ The general Catholic stance with regard to violence as well as to a wide range of social problems is that both theological

⁵⁵ Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: On Earth as it is in Heaven* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 3-4.

⁵⁶ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 1.

⁵⁷ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 3.

⁵⁸ Thomas Nairn, "To Reverse the Cycle of Violence, Try Humility," *Health Progress* (2016): 79.

reflection and religious conversion are relevant, appropriate, valuable, and even necessary responses but that they do not eliminate the need for a broader social response based on social analysis and a reading of "the signs of the times" leading normally through public action to institutional change.⁵⁹ This stance allows for learning and co-operation in dealing with common human problems across confessional and ideological lines.⁶⁰ A conversation with African traditional religion and theology is helpful as this narrows down to concrete human actions.

African Theology

African theology has the challenge of breaking the cycle of violence. The whole of African is filled with violence. "Violence generates itself. Whoever finds himself or herself in this cycle of violence, always has a good reason to retaliate. Violence builds on previous violence and anticipates more violence to come. The challenge is to break this cycle."⁶¹ What strategy is African theology to adapt to make this happen? Often, ethnicity is blamed for the ongoing violence in Africa. In reality, ethnicity may have contributed to crisis in Africa but not as often projected. While the ethnic group is the predominant means of social identity formation in Africa, most ethnic groups coexist peacefully with high degrees of mixing through interethnic marriage, economic partnerships, and shared values.⁶² Not to understand these forms of partnership and collaboration leads to the misdiagnosis of African conflicts as 'ethnic' this ignores the political nature of the issues. People do not kill each other because of ethnic differences; they kill each other when these differences are

⁵⁹ John Langan, "Violence and Injustice in Society: Recent Catholic Teaching," *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 693.

⁶⁰ Langan, *Violence and Injustice in Society*, 693.

⁶¹ Ian A. Nell, "The Tears of Xenophobia: Preaching and Violence from a South African Perspective," *Practical Theology in South Africa* 24, no. 2 (2008): 238.

⁶² Clement Mweyang Aapengnuo, "Misinterpreting Ethnic Conflicts in Africa," *Joint Force Quarterly* 58, no.3 (2010):14.

promoted as the barrier to advancement and opportunity.⁶³ Therefore, it is necessary for African theology of dialogue to reconstruct this view of African conflicts if it will be successful in fostering a dialogue of life on the continent.

Translating the same message within the context of the ongoing violence in Taraba, African theology must engage cultural practices of reconciliation and peace-building. This is a mutual dynamic process of engaging values that are at the heart of the people. Emmanuel Katogole argues that such social dynamism of conversing with local situations has been part of Christian theology, and “if we are able to recover such social material dynamism of Christianity, then we may be struck by the same realization as Dubois was in 1914, namely that there is always something new out of Africa.”⁶⁴ As the African theologian Jean-Marc Ella would say, “at every moment I must be alert for something new that can spring into life. I must constantly live with my ears pricked up to catch the faintest murmur of the spirit who speaks to the church in the context of the African.”⁶⁵ Consequently, from the many clashes and disagreements noticed in the case of Taraba state Nigeria, it could be said that “in short, any theology that fails to address violence fails the test of time and may be deemed irrelevant.”⁶⁶ That is why the fundamental practical theology of Johann Baptist Metz is a very helpful tool in addressing the violence in Taraba.

Metz Categories

In the treatment of violence in Johann Baptist Metz’s theology, it is helpful to remember that “Metz offers not a map but a compass by which to negotiate our

⁶³ Aapengnuo, *Misinterpreting Ethic Conflicts in Africa*, 14.

⁶⁴ Emmanuel M. Katongole, "A Different World Right Here, a World being Gestated in the Deeds of the Everyday: The Church within African Theological Imagination," *Missionalia* 30, no. 2 (2002): 232.

⁶⁵ Jean-Marc Ella, *My Faith as an African* (Eugene, OR: Wift & Stock, 1988), 6.

⁶⁶ Isabel Phiri and Julius Gathogo, "A Reconstructive Motif in South African Black Theology in the Twenty-first Century," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36 (2010): 202.

engagements.”⁶⁷ According to Metz, when facing questions from victims who have suffered an unjust violence, consensus or horizontal communication is worth very little; what matters is to respond to their suffering and injustice. The reason of the defeated is a cry, a denunciation, a demand for justice, and its strength comes from the experience of injustice and not from communication or persuasive power.⁶⁸ Metz subsequently insists that from this memory of the long forgotten and innocent sufferers is to spring true theology and praxis.

An analysis of Metz's three distinctions within narrative theology outlines a new and fundamental religious literature that is useful for a theology of dialogue for life in Taraba. Metz highlights the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity. It should be noted, however, that while it is helpful to discuss memory, narrative and solidarity separately, Metz considers the three concepts complete only in their unity. Therefore, in an effort to concretize his theory of memory-narrative- solidarity,⁶⁹ Metz argues that theology is not based entirely on pure theory and abstract reason or reflection. Memory, he interjects, is a deciding noetic category in theology. Memory cannot evade or gloss over catastrophes of innocent suffering. Instead, this remembering confronts the oppressiveness of the past. It is not, like its opposite, forgetfulness, an indifference towards or denial of past victims and the dead.⁷⁰ In

⁶⁷ John K. Downey, *Loves Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 1999), 3.

⁶⁸ Manuel Losada-Sierra and John Mandalios, "The Prophetic Reason for Religious and Cultural Understanding," *The International Journal of Civic, Political, and Community Studies* II, no. 2 (2014): 14-15.

⁶⁹ Michon Marie Matthiesen, "Narrative of Suffering: Complementary Reflections of Theological Anthropology in Johann Metz and Elie Wiesel," *Religion & Literature* 18, no. 2 (1986): 48.

⁷⁰ Matthiesen, *Narrative of Suffering*, 49.

essence, Metz is deriving from the memory of Christ's passion an inclusive and liberating outline for a more authentic human existence.⁷¹

For Metz, violence is to be understood against a background of intense solidarity with the passion of Christ which is reflected in the suffering of humanity. "Not only does Metz suggest a pause on the death of Jesus but also on the suffering and death of all humanity of all times: Metz looks to the 'concrete and all-encompassing history of suffering' to adequately treat the question of the meaning and redemptive value of suffering."⁷² Violence ultimately breeds suffering and interreligious and ethnic violence the kind that is reflective of Taraba state is not exempted. Therefore, looking to Metz to explain this relationship is critical and transforming. However, a caution is observed, Tweed pauses to remind scholars of the blind spots that do exist in this process. Since the terrain is changing, and since the observer is moving, and since no one position is the same as another, no scholar can possibly observe religions and religious people from all angles. The inability to be everywhere and see everything, however, does not mean that scholars should stop meandering toward truth.⁷³ However, it is important to remember that scholars are always standing somewhere, coming from somewhere, and going somewhere with their interpretations. As long as scholars at least try to know where they are situated, Tweed believes that checks can be applied to the potential power of interpretation.⁷⁴

Interpreting the sufferings of people (the victims of suffering) within their context, and in relation to the sufferings of Jesus becomes the hub of theology of

⁷¹Matthiesen, *Narrative of Suffering*, 50.

⁷² Donald L. Wallenfang, "Listen to Me: The Soteriology of Johann Baptist Metz and its Effect on Ministry with Adolescents," Essay, Walsh University, North Canton, Ohio, 2009, 8.

⁷³ Michael Pasquier, "Tweed A Thomas, Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion," *Geographies of Religions and Belief System* 1, Issue 1(October, 2006): 74.

⁷⁴ Pasquier, *Tweed A Thomas, Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, 74.

violence. Thus, Thomas Tweed admonishes that one must feel a need to acknowledge his or her own shifting position as an interpreter⁷⁵ as one struggles to understand the pains of the victims. In an effort to explain such a process, Metz acknowledges that a theologian should seek to understand the entire history (past, present and future) of human suffering and the complex relationships among its various dimensions in a given society. Suffering is redemptive inasmuch as it gives rise to the most profound occasion to exercise filial trust in the God of deliverance. Suffering can be endured because the one who suffers unwaveringly trusts that this suffering will soon be alleviated and healed.⁷⁶ For Metz “an adequate appropriation of human suffering must include a thorough and constant remembering of the concrete, historical sufferings of humanity. Without such tragic remembering, the power of salvation in Christ remains fallow.”⁷⁷

In order for Christian theology to be relevant it must be transformed from paper to praxis, a praxis informed by its cognitive correlates of memory and narrative.⁷⁸ Narrative memory is the *sine qua non* of conversion and salvation. It is only through the telling and re-telling of both personal narratives and Jesus’ narrative (which is at once our narrative) that faith comes alive, validating its history and *raison d’être*. The process of storytelling, and ensuing compassionate empathy, thus serves as a pivotal breakthrough in validating the precious personal and communal identities of people, allowing them to own their personal histories and to embrace Jesus’ history

⁷⁵ Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 7.

⁷⁶ Wallenfang, *Listen to Me*, 8.

⁷⁷ Wallenfang, *Listen to Me*, 9.

⁷⁸ Wallenfang, *Listen to Me*, 14.

and the history of the Church as their own.⁷⁹ This means that the vision of conflicts and violence are imagined within a particular, category and position.

⁷⁹ Wallenfang, *Listen to Me*, 15.

Chapter Four: Dangerous Memories as a Key to Unlocking

Ethno Religious Violence in Taraba

Introduction

Chapter 4 is the first of the three chapters oriented around the “judge” component of “see-judge-act.” This chapter, as with the following two, takes one of the three categories central to theological reflection on ethno religious violence in the context of Taraba State, applying the approach as first modeled by Metz. The focus of this first of the three “judging” chapters is on how identity and experience are shaped by relationships understood in the light of scripture and tradition. God's self-revelation can only be in relationship since God reveals God self as a Trinitarian community of persons. The Synod of Bishops’ Second Special Assembly for Africa decried the situation of poor relations among followers of Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions, citing distrust and rivalries between these groups. This chapter acknowledges that mistrust on all sides hinders peaceful dialogue and mutual understanding¹ in places like Taraba State. The question now is, how do people build this trusting relationship? That question forms the hub of this chapter.

Dangerous Memories and Relationships

Metz’s understanding of relationships speaks to the last two decades of both ethno religious tensions and public relations in Taraba State. Interests in relationships have soared because of the culture of dissent that is palpable and the deepest concern is to maintain and enhance the relationship between different ethnic groups and affiliations and to collaborate on future outcomes in conflict situations. Nearly all relationships evoke judgments of fairness at some point: at work people are concerned

¹ Synod of Bishops, “II Special Assembly for Africa. Instrumentum Laboris,” in *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace* (Nairobi: Pauline’s, 2009).

with the fairness of pay, at home couples are concerned with the fairness of household responsibilities, in school students are concerned with the fairness of grades, and in the marketplace consumers are concerned with the fairness of transactions. Acts of perceived unfairness in turn put tremendous pressure on relationships: perceived fairness is a central element of maintaining relationships with others.²

Lack of fairness evokes the dangerous memory of past injustices among the unprivileged tribal groups in Taraba. In the process of expressing their grievances they often times take to armed violent protests. The experiences resulting from constant clashes, friction, tension, and destructions in Taraba, evoke the dangerous memories underscored in Metz political theology: “Thanks to the dangerous memory, reality is unmasked and people finally admit things are not as they should or could be. Then they can take collective action to heal the brokenness in their current situation.”³ Metz argues that “these memories are dangerous because they draw our attention to human suffering in the past, and therefore wake us from our everyday slumbering, and disturb us in our ingrained evolutionary time, according to which things are going on just as usual.”⁴ Often, the government looks the other way round as the Muslim Fulani pastoralists continue to kill innocent Christian agriculturalists many of whom are forgotten. This is where Metz’ recalling of the dangerous memory of their situation becomes important to stimulate the consciousness of society to the atrocities around the place.

² Pankaj Aggarwal and Richard P. Larrick, "When Consumers Care about Being Treated Fairly: The Interaction of Relationship Norms and Fairness Norms," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 22, no. 1 (2012): 115.

³ Stephanie Spellers, "The Church Awake: Becoming the Missional People of God," *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (2010): 42.

⁴ Jakob Dahlbacka, "Religious Uses of History as Inclusion and Exclusion," *Studies on Religion and Memory* 2 (2016): 27-28.

In particular, Metz's presentation of memory attempts to retrieve the memory of those who have suffered and died. Such retrieval is not just a psychological or anthropological recognition of the subject.⁵ Rather, Metz expands on the '*memoria passionis*,' the memory of suffering; which is a criterion for survival: it is a dangerous memory that spurs someone to strive harder to rise above the present situation. The *memoria passionis* is important because one ties one's suffering to the sufferings of Jesus and finds meaning in God.

To the Christian, the memory of suffering is dangerous because it warns us where things have gone wrong and challenges our comfort in the official story. The memory of suffering, our own and especially that of others connects each with the other and provides a practical warming system about distorted relationships, institutions and situations.⁶ In his analysis of the moral significance of *memoria passionis*, Metz argues that it is critical that the appeal to the *memoria passionis* involves not only the call for the remembrance of the past suffering of one's own culture, but also the suffering experienced in other cultures and even the suffering of one's enemies. Where a fixation on the history of suffering in one's own culture often leads to hatred and violence, Metz argues that the remembrance of the suffering of one's enemies represents the only legitimate path toward an authentic politics of peace.⁷ This is hardly surprising, because ultimately for Metz certain memories, the memories of injustice and defeat, have the capacity to preserve the identity of the subjects of suffering, especially those long dead. These are "dangerous memories"

⁵Gerard Ryan, "Charles Taylor and the Political Recognition of Difference as a Resource for Theological Reflection on Religious Recognition," *Open Theology* 2, no. 1 (2016): 908.

⁶ John K. Downey, ed., *Love Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999), 8.

⁷ Mathew Eggemeier, "A Post-Secular Modernity? Jürgen Habermas, Joseph Ratzinger and Johann Baptist Metz on Religion, Reason and Politics," *The Heythrop Journal* 53, no. 3 (2012): 460.

which call into question the record of the victors in history and which do not allow the stories of the victims to be silenced. Such dangerous memories challenge us to eradicate present suffering, as they disclose the hope of a future without suffering.⁸

God has created humanity for greatness; however, “Human beings can rise to great heights or sink to deep lows.”⁹ Continuous conflicts with massive murders and wanton destruction of property in Taraba shows humanity as its lowest ebb. Taraba State has become a jungle where the phrase, ‘animal eats animal’ is reigning. The ever increasing wave of ethno-religious violence attests to this. Unfortunately, it is not only Taraba but in fact the whole of the Nigerian nation state appears to be in the same quagmire. How would Metz theology address this situation? From a practical theological approach, the three terms of Metz categories: memory, solidarity and narratives, reversed here for critical examination to relationships, narratives and community come into focus as important categories in restoring broken relationships in Taraba. Therefore considering these categories in depth and building on the composition of the people in Taraba, Metz categories will respond to the ethnic and religious crisis. Metz’s categories and theological approach are a good resource for engaging complicated broken relationships that may result into serious violent conflicts. The point is behind these violent conflicts exist the image of a God who is intimately tied to human relationships, including hostile encounters.¹⁰ Metz has memorably describes the Christian faith in terms of the critical liberating memory of Jesus Christ. “Against a technologically rationalized society which is becoming more ‘history-less’ and ‘tradition-less,’ Metz proposes an interpretation of the Christian

⁸ Johann M. Vento, "Violence, Trauma, and Resistance: A Feminist Appraisal of Metz's Mysticism of Suffering unto God," *Horizons* 29, no. 01 (2002): 9.

⁹ “Good, Morality, ‘God and Evil,’ " *Reporter* (2011):1.

¹⁰ Mark Juergensmeyer and Margo Kitts, eds., *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011), 7.

faith as a dangerous memory which breaks through the prevailing consciousness and undermines its compliancy.”¹¹ In specific terms the Christian faith must be willing and ready to live out its demands in the face of critical challenges affecting Christians.

As earlier mentioned, for Metz the three fundamental categories of his theology are ‘memory, solidarity and narratives.’¹² Possibly, “Metz’s political theology provides the lenses of memory, of solidarity and of narratives so that we can look at our world and act in ways that bring more abundant life.”¹³ Perhaps, a critical fact is “these are haunting memories of the world-as-it-should-be, and they stand in stark relief against the pain of the world-as-it-is.”¹⁴ Such contrasts and twists set up an interest in this unfolding drama: ethno religious violence in Taraba. Since, relationships touch on cultures, Metz interjects that politics is actually the new name for culture and in this sense; too, any theology which tries to reflect on Christian traditions in the context of world problems and to bring about the process of transference between the kingdom of God and society is a political theology.¹⁵ However, to effectively interrogate ethno religious violence in Taraba, these categories are reversed in conversation with similar but distinct categories: relationship, narratives and community. Such exchange is particularly helpful because, it is only by concretely calling this situation by what they are can they be addressed.

The *Vanguard*, a Nigerian newspaper recently highlighted the heightening tension between Muslim Fulani pastoralists and Christian agriculturalists in Taraba.

¹¹ Joselito Henson, "The Church in the Context of Political Theology: The Ecclesiology of Johann Baptist Metz," *Landas: Journal of Loyola School of Theology* 13, no. 2 (1999): 65.

¹² Downey, *Love Strategy*, 8.

¹³ Downey, *Love Strategy*, 8.

¹⁴ Spellers, "The Church Awake," 42.

¹⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1981), 102.

The largely agrarian Christian communities maintain that the Muslim Fulani herdsmen are engaged in a prolonged battle to gobble up land from them, the so-called indigenous people. Fulani's on the other hand claim that they face discrimination and are deprived of basic rights, including access to land, education and political offices, despite having lived in the area for generations.¹⁶ Here comes the issue of unfairness as spring board for injustice that often leads to crises in Taraba.

The apparent situation in Taraba is particularly dire since the Fulani herdsmen continuing clashes have led to instability with increasing death tolls. What amazes an observer is the spontaneity of the crises. For instance, in December 2016, a few hours after an abrupt violent crisis erupted, “eighteen people ... [were] feared killed and many others [were reportedly] missing in a violent clash between Tivs and Fulani's in Sabon Gidan village of Dan Anacha town in Gassol Local Council of Taraba State.”¹⁷ News reports from the area said the crisis started when two death bodies (corpses) of the Fulani's were found in a nearby bush. This triggered alleged reprisal attacks on Tivs. A resident of the area said he counted about twenty bodies that were allegedly killed in the early hours of the first day of the crisis.¹⁸ As the second day went by, the crisis spread to neighboring villages and town involving other tribes as well. It was gathered that “no fewer than fifty people, including a soldier, were reportedly killed and several others injured in Wukari, the headquarters of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State ..., following a bloody clash between the Fulani herdsmen and Jukuns in the area. Places of worships were among several buildings that were burnt

¹⁶“Fulani herders kill 15 in Taraba — Police,” *Vanguard*, April 13, 2016, accessed February 2, 2017, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/04/fulani-herders-kill-15-taraba-police/>.

¹⁷ Charles Akpeji, “18 feared killed in Taraba violence,” *Guardian Newspaper*, December 19, 2016, <http://guardian.ng/news/18-feared-killed-in-taraba-violence/>.

¹⁸ Akpeji, “18 Feared Killed in Taraba Violence.”

by the belligerent groups.”¹⁹ Actions, such as these have become a constant in Taraba, it generates fear which in turn breeds dissent, confrontation and embittered memories. Embittered memories affect the human spirit. The fact of the matter is that:

It is these experiences that cause one to face the rawness and harshness of reality while moving from insobriety to stupor. Pain, suffering and death cause one to question the reality of God and the meaning of life. These experiences, in the depths of their depravity, derangement and obscenity, drain the human spirit of all that is good, leaving it languishing and desperate for any scent of hope. It is at this threshold between despair and hope where Metz looks to the Christian kerygma to speak a good word to a wounded and numb humanity.²⁰

The fact is that repeated clashes in ethnic and religious crises in Taraba are changing and redrawing the way life is lived. This developing climate invites interrogation. The landscapes are redrawn and relationships are mapped and shaped in different negative directions which mean “in brief, memory can creatively interrupt the present and in doing so has the capacity to awaken hope in alternative styles of individual and social existence.”²¹ This extreme form of memory corroborates Metz’s position that “human beings are a result not only of their genes but also of their histories. If they want to understand who they are, humans need not only to experiment with themselves but also to allow themselves to be told something.”²² They serve as grounds for not only constructive and critical response but “on the

¹⁹ “Fulani/Jukun Clash: Soldier, 50 Others Killed in Taraba,” *Vanguard*, April 17, 2014, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/04/fulanijukun-clash-soldier-50-others-killed-taraba/>

²⁰ Donald L. Wallenfang, "Listen to Me: The Soteriology of Johann Baptist Metz and its Effect on Ministry with Adolescents," Paper presented to the Concilium symposium at Loyola University Chicago, June, 2009, 7-8.

²¹ Dermot A. Lane, "Hope-in Need of Retrieval," *The Way* 39 (1999): 332.

²² Johann Baptist Metz, "Facing the World: A Theological and Biographical Inquiry," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 trans. John K. Downey (2014): 31.

contrary, ...[they try] to carry out the speaking about God by making the connection between the Christian message and the modern world visible and expressing the Christian tradition in this world as a dangerous memory.”²³ Metz underlines, “the memory of suffering as a category of political theology is primarily the memory of neighbors’ suffering rather than mine. However, there is always a distorted form of dangerous memory, which identifies the memory of suffering with my tragic experience.”²⁴ When we remember the history of suffering, therefore, an appeal to universal freedom, justice, and rights for all human beings is needed to prevent our suffering from turning into a political weapon to attack others.²⁵

Human relationships are encountered as dangerous memories in the ethnoreligious crisis of Taraba on two levels: on the one hand, these encounters serve as the ‘lived experiences’ currently undergone by victims and perpetrators of these acts, they are visible realities, painful, and lived. At the same time victims and perpetrators of these actions are the living proof of the vulnerability and destruction of such actions. They carry with them the bitter struggles for understanding and relevance which their current situation represent and present. “These subjects have an identity gained through the memories of sufferings, memories decisively represented in the memory of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ.”²⁶ Metz forces us to understand that what is needed is not just more generosity on the part of the bourgeoisie, not just

²³ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 89.

²⁴ Jin-Hyok Kim, “Memory of Suffering as Continual Social Criticism: The Political Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz in Relation to the Challenges of Modernity,” *Korean Journal of Systematic Theology* 36, no. 9(2013): 332.

²⁵ Kim, “Memory of Suffering as Continual Social Criticism,” 332.

²⁶ Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 65.

increased production or better understanding but a total conversion of who we are and how we live in history.²⁷

Dangerous memories offer a critical constructive frame that interprets the consequences of broken relationships and take responsibility of the continuous breakdown of relationships in ethno religious relations in Taraba. Dangerous memories would provide a vision for transforming ethno religious relations in Taraba. The memory of suffering serves a twofold purpose. Firstly, it reminds us that suffering is part of the human condition and that it cannot be ignored. Secondly, the remembrance of suffering should lead us to ‘analyze the causes of suffering, a step necessary for developing political strategies of resistance.’ Hence the memory of suffering is dangerous memory because it prompts resistance and social change.²⁸

Dangerous Memories and Social Change

Dangerous memories are not a particular kind or function of memory that can be isolated and defined; rather they are a disruptive practice of and from memory. In a sense, then, any memory can become dangerous when it resists the prevailing historical narratives. Consequently, dangerous memories are neither simply individual nor collective but political in the sense that they involve power relations, revealing the patterns of violence and suffering at work. Further, dangerous memories may constitute new affective economies that inspire solidarity through the memory of suffering.²⁹ In keeping with this, Metz who was deeply influenced by Walter Benjamin, argues that history is not the total sum of the actions and the interpretations

²⁷ Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering*, 80-81.

²⁸ K. Hannah Holtschneider, “The Shadow of the Shoah: A Review Essay,” *Journal of Religion & Society* 2, no. 5 (2003): 4.

²⁹ Zembylas Michalinos Bekermanzvi, “Education and the Dangerous Memories of Historical Trauma: Narratives of Pain, Narratives of Hope,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 38, no. 2 (2008): 124-154.

of the victors but, rather, the reality of the sufferings of human victims.³⁰ In a sense therefore, the best way to keep alert to the dangers of ideology and neurosis may well be to keep in mind what Walter Benjamin has so aptly called dangerous memories; namely remembrance of the dead, those who suffered and were defeated (Ideologies and neuroses have the obsessive outlook of those determined to be winners.) Most dangerous are the memories of the evils we have committed or the costs we did not or could not correct.³¹

In a way, Metz's 'theory of action' innovatively occasions a 'transformation,' which 'entails recognizing the capacity for guilt in all acting subjects.' It is this inclusion of guilt in how one understands memory that locates Metz's presentation of memory as distinctive. Indeed, the capacity for guilt is not so much a record of sin or offence committed, but the capacity for guilt ought to move the Christian toward a greater action of concern and compassion.³² This notion of dangerous memory is embodied in the Christian concept of love which is exemplified in the selfless and unconditional life offering of Christ on the cross. This love is essentially freedom from the domination of humans over fellow humans. This is what motivated Christ to identify himself with the poor and oppressed to vigorously proclaim the promised justice, peace, and freedom for all.³³ Such an understanding becomes an avenue for critical and constructive engagement, since memory challenges us to move forward and establish strong connections between memory and truth because selective or false

³⁰ Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering*, 74.

³¹ Robert Dodaro, "Sacramentum Caritatis As The Foundation of Augustine's Spirituality," *The Asbury Journal* 51, no. 1 (1995): 49

³² Ryan, *Charles Taylor and the Political Recognition of Difference*, 909.

³³ Henson, *The Church in the Context of Political Theology*, 65.

memories can become oppressive ideologies in the future. The drive for memory helps recover the narratives of those who have suffered unjustly.³⁴

When one considers the origin and the concept of memory from its Hebraic roots, it is called *Zakhor*, which is striking and means not only “you will remember” but “you will continue to tell,” to recount, to testify.³⁵ In this case, memory is instrumental in the formation of human identity and a number of scholars have argued for its significance. The fact is to be human is to be marked by our capacity to remember.³⁶ Significantly, “man becomes subject through memory, which is the reason for memory being of such crucial importance to his existence throughout the time during which he sees himself as a conscious being.”³⁷ This moves people to want to take control of their histories and create history through processes of change.

Memory then bears the responsibility of self contemplation and self expression. However, individuals often suppose that they know the history of the ethnic, religious, and national groups to which they belong. Their historical memories include details and interpretations of past events that they did not personally experience. These historical memories are to group identity what personal memories are to individual identity. Similarly, historical memory as such is the glue that connects group members, events, and ideas through time and space. Regardless of their accuracy, historical memories provide the bases of people’s understanding of the origins, story, and characteristics of a group. Historical memories help establish and support individuals’ beliefs about their group’s uniqueness and standing relative to

³⁴ Marcel Uwineza, "Memory: A Theological Imperative in Post-genocide Rwanda," *Hekima Review* 54 (2016): 53.

³⁵ Uwineza, *Memory: A Theological Imperative*, 52.

³⁶ Uwineza, *Memory: A Theological Imperative*, 52.

³⁷ Paul Ricœur, "Healing the Wounds of the Past and Promoting Development in Rwanda: the Church's Stance on the Genocide and Civil War," *Encounter Beyond Routine* 81 (1986): 72.

other groups.³⁸ This is what implicates relationships among the ethnic groups of Taraba State.

Memory therefore contributes to our disposition and interpretation of the world. Metz argues, “the memory of human suffering forces us to look at the public not merely from the standpoint of the successful and the established, from that of the conquered and the victims.”³⁹ The past of the victims is full of meaning because it is recognized as an injustice that questions the present. These are dangerous memories because they visit the present and question it. These could be subversive memories with a liberating message for the future. It is necessary, therefore, to take a look at the vanquished and the defeated in history and develop a kind of anti-history.⁴⁰ It also includes critical measures that must be done in order to stand in continuity with the dangerous memories and the subjugated knowledge in and behind the biblical text.⁴¹

By retrieving these memories, a more constructive path will open for constructing better relations in ethno religious conflicts in Taraba. Taraba underscores these memories as illustrated by heightened incidences of provocations, after attacks which are carried out on victims, whose lives are destroyed and communities displaced. As if such tragedies are not enough, matters are complicated when the burial of these victims are subsequently challenged. An incidence took place in a particular local government area of Taraba. A group recently conducting investigation in an area which had been heavily attacked and destroyed received:

³⁸ Bilali Rezarta and Michael A. Ross, "Remembering Intergroup Conflict," *The Oxford handbook of intergroup conflict* (2012): 123.

³⁹ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 105.

⁴⁰ Losada-Sierra Manuel and John Mandalios, "The Prophetic Reason for Religious and Cultural Understanding," *The International Journal of Civic, Political, and Community Studies* 11, no. 2 (2014): 18.

⁴¹ James Cochrane and Gerald O. West, "War, Remembrance and Reconstruction," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 84 (1993): 28.

A letter written by a particular traditional leader in Bali LGA [Local Government Area], stopping the burial of Utsua Daar, a 103 year old Christian victim killed during the recent Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen attack. The burial was denied on grounds that the deceased was an infidel and did not belong to the area. Thus, even in death, Christians are rejected in the area. And yet the deceased Utsua Daar was said to have been born and brought up in the area long before the chief in question was born. This opens up a new chapter in the whole crisis.⁴²

Such incidences which are popular at the moment in Taraba invoke memories that are disruptive because they call for solidarity with others on the basis of common human suffering. These kinds of disruptions, says Metz, count as dangerous memories when we remember events of the past that question our consciences and assumed horizons; “dangerous,” then, takes the meaning of challenging, critical, and hopeful. Such memories function in ways that make us re-collect and re-configure individual and collective consciousness into a new process of narrativization: re-claiming forgotten connections with others in ways that involve acts of compassion, self-criticality and resistance to the status quo.⁴³ These examples show how memory, in particular in the context of remembering the horrors of the past, is one instrument to pave the way for strengthening a group’s sense of identity and unity.⁴⁴

The dangerous memories call to mind the different fault lines that have befallen us and lead to our silence in many cases. To this end Metz suggests a global

⁴² Abdulbarkindo Adamu and Alupse Ben, “Violent Conflict in Divided Societies the Case Study of Violent Conflict in Taraba State (2013 - 2015): The Deeper Reality of the Violent Conflict in Taraba State and the Plight of Christians,” *Nigeria Conflict and Security Analysis Network Working Paper 2* (2015): 58.

⁴³ Bekermanzvi, *Education and the Dangerous Memories*, 124-154.

⁴⁴ Ricœur, *Healing the Wounds of the Past and Promoting Development in Rwanda*, 72.

program for Christianity under the heading of compassion which may be understood not as a somewhat vague empathy, not as an inconsequential pity, not as a philanthropic sentiment, but as a participatory awareness of the strangers' suffering, as an active remembrance of the suffering other.⁴⁵ The memory of suffering which provides much fodder for theological and ethical reflection on difficult questions such as how Christians should remember, and it is imperative to warn against the potentially destructive abuses of memory which engender hatred and violence.⁴⁶ In concrete terms, the atrocities carried out by Fulani herdsmen in Taraba garbed in violence is specifically targeted, based on gender, religion and ethnicity which destroys relationships. It is regrettable to observe that:

Four attacks were carried out and in these attacks; Christian women and children were specifically targeted. The killing of Christian women was about twenty five percent, the destruction of business properties and shops belonging to Christian women were about thirty seven percent, injuries sustained by Christian women and children twenty two percent and the killing of children was twelve percent.⁴⁷

What seems novel is that Metz's understanding of the Christian response to suffering is rooted in his approach to theological anthropology, particularly his understanding of sin and grace. He notes that "the biblical traditions know a particular type of universal responsibility," which, contrary to mainstream theological approaches, is not primarily directed toward the universalism of sin and failure, but

⁴⁵ Metz, *Facing the world*, 30.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo, "Remembering the Massacre at El Mozote: A Case for the Dangerous Memory of Suffering as Christian Formation in Hope," *International Journal for Practical Theology* 17, no .1 (2013): 64.

⁴⁷ Atta Barkindo, Benjamin Tyavkase Gudaku and Caroline Katgurum, "Our Bodies, Their Battleground: Boko Haram and Gender-Based Violence against Christian Women and Children in North-Eastern Nigeria since 1999" *NPVRN Working Paper* 1 (2013): 28.

rather toward the universalism of suffering in the world.”⁴⁸ As Metz observes, ‘Jesus didn’t look first to the sin of others but to the suffering of others. To him sin was above all a refusal to participate in the suffering of others, a refusal to see beyond one’s own history of suffering.’ In light of the fact that the Christian community originated as ‘a community of memory and narrative in imitation of Jesus,’ ‘its primary task was to attend to ‘the suffering of others.’ Therefore, for Metz, sin is to close one’s eyes to the suffering of our neighbors⁴⁹ who weep innocently for help.

The Cry of the Innocent

The fact is “memory has a deeply religious significance.”⁵⁰ The bitter memories of a people can be suppressed or repressed. They cannot be erased, buried without account. Nor can they be healed by suppressing or repressing them. The lack of healing, particularly if the memories are sufficiently intense and extensive, will engender not only personal brokenness but social brokenness.⁵¹ The constant killings and displacement of communities in Taraba by Fulani herdsmen bear this out as personal tragedies and bitter encounters are narrated. When recounted, it is painful and unpleasant. Metz insists that the memory of Christ’s identification with the oppressed and rejected and his announcement of the coming Kingdom of God still have a liberating and redemptive power that can impact upon our present. The remembered freedom of Jesus and his Kingdom is dangerous within our present world because it “anticipates the future as a future of those who are oppressed, without hope

⁴⁸ Gretchen Baumgardt, "Opening First-World Catholic Theology to Third-World Ecofeminism: Aruna Gnanadason and Johann B. Metz in Dialogue" (PhD diss., Marquette University, Wisconsin, 2012), 122.

⁴⁹ Baumgardt, *Opening First-World Catholic Theology to Third-World Ecofeminism*, 122.

⁵⁰ C. H. Thesnaar, "Memories Liberate the Past," *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* 52, no. 3- 4 (2011): 533.

⁵¹ Cochrane and West, *War, Remembrance and Reconstruction*, 25.

and doomed to fail.”⁵² In Taraba, a place where ethnic and religious tensions have polarized the community and displaced many makes an interesting case. Questions of social inequality and injustice are of profound interest, and involved a desire for them to be answered, for all too often they are found to co-exist with the suffering of the innocent.⁵³

By engaging the cries of those caught in the thick of this crises from a Judeo Christian perspective is critical. Many instances in scriptures and church practices reveal a God who is involved in the affairs of the people. The Old Testament presents a God who takes sides in battle and avenges on their behalf. While in the New Testament, Christians remember the slavery of the Hebrews in Egypt, the exile of Israel in Babylon, the massacre of the Holy Innocents, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the suffering of the early Christian martyrs. However, the Christian tradition always and only remembers these sufferings in relation to the hope-filled promises of the Exodus, the return from exile, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection. Thus, Christian memory of suffering is always linked to hope for and the promise of a future in which suffering will be no more.⁵⁴ In a sense, cries for vengeance by those who have been persecuted to the point of death are a common theme in Jewish and Christian literature. Often they are combined with a prayer requesting retaliation for the murder of the righteous. Examples of such prayers can be found in 2 Maccabees 8:2-4; Revelation 6:9-11. Common to these prayers is the mention of either shed blood or

⁵² John Marsden, “The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz,” *Heythrop Journal* 53, no. 3(2010):445.

⁵³ Michael D. Stringer, "Our Cries in His Cry: Suffering and the Crucified God" (M. Th. Thesis., University of Notre Dame, Sydney, Australia, 2003), 52.

⁵⁴ Gandolfo, *Remembering the Massacre at El Mozote*, 63.

blood crying out and the demand that God avenge the death of the righteous.⁵⁵ In effect, relationships are deeply compromised and completely obliterated.

What is most interesting is ‘as members of a silenced, marginalized and sometimes ignored race discover the silenced, ignored and marginalized people in the scriptures and develop an affinity with them,’ They also discover ‘a text that has been silenced but one that speaks through this silence about the struggles of the silenced and marginalized people of the Bible.’ This they can do because their physical and psychological scars together with the analytical tools they have chosen enable them, a people whose story of pain, fears and hopes have been suppressed, ‘to discover the suppressed and forgotten stories of the weak and the poor of the Bible ’ These stories are interpreted by them as God identifying with the forgotten and the weak and God retrieving them from the margins of the social world.⁵⁶ Since this is a largely human affair it also requires a human solution. Hence, it is important that a deeper introspection is forged. Moreover, “the ‘burden’ and ‘greatness’ of being rooted in the belief of God calls upon us to engage ‘the social and political life of others’ by challenging any foundation built on hatred and violence.”⁵⁷

The foundation for the Christian's solidarity with the suffering of the world lies in the specific dangerous memory of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. This memory carries the eschatological promise of God that death will not triumph in human history. According to Metz, the memory of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection implies that the meaning of the victims of history has not been

⁵⁵John Byron, "Abel's Blood and the Ongoing Cry for Vengeance," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2011):747.

⁵⁶ Cochrane and West, *War, Remembrance and Reconstruction*, 30.

⁵⁷ Baumgardt, *Opening First-World Catholic Theology to Third-World Ecofeminism*, 122.

decided by the victors.⁵⁸ Metz's refusal to find meaning in radical suffering, to excuse it, or to trivialize it with explanation, is essential in working against tendencies in Christian theology to encourage victims passively to accept or to spiritualize their suffering. He refuses to reduce human suffering to a theory or to try to fit it comfortably into a concept of God. His understanding of 'suffering unto God,' of the need to continue to cry out to God in the language of prayer about the suffering of the vulnerable, respects the negativity of the experience of suffering and refuses to let it be ignored.⁵⁹

The suffering, which causes us to cry out or finally to be pitifully silent is never something lofty, it is nothing great or exalted. In its roots it is completely different from a strong, compassionate solidarity. It is not even a sign of love, but far more frighteningly a symptom of not being able to love any more.⁶⁰ As Metz underlines, the memory of suffering as a category of political theology is primarily the memory of neighbors' suffering rather than mine. However, there is always a distorted form of dangerous memory, which identifies the memory of suffering with my tragic experience. When we remember the history of suffering, therefore, an appeal to universal freedom, justice, and rights for all human beings is needed to prevent my suffering from turning into a political weapon to attack others.⁶¹ In the face of concrete histories of suffering, theology must be theodicy. But Metz does not mean by this what is commonly associated with theodicy, that is, the justification of God's goodness in the face of suffering or evil. For Metz theodicy is the lived question addressed to God about the suffering of the world, not a tidy answer to it.

⁵⁸ Johann M. Vento, "Violence, Trauma, and Resistance: A Feminist Appraisal of Metz's Mysticism of Suffering unto God," *Horizons* 29, no. 01 (2002): 9.

⁵⁹ Vento, *Violence, Trauma, and Resistance*, 11.

⁶⁰ Johann Baptist Metz, "Suffering from God: Theology as Theodicy," *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 5, no. 3 (1992):286.

⁶¹ Kim, *Memory of Suffering as Continual Social Criticism*, 332.

The question itself is based on faith in God and God's promises for the salvation of all⁶² even in the midst of human failures.

Rethinking Violence as failure of Relationships

Basically violence is the coercive attempt to limit or thwart the exercise and realization of the essential and effective freedom of a human person or a social group. It aims to obliterate the fundamental liberty or active, dynamic, determination of self by the human person. Violence seeks to destroy not only the body, but the spirit as well; hence, it breeds despair, hopelessness, and rage.⁶³ Today, everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.⁶⁴ In a contested and divided space like Taraba, where all of the sentiments expressed are true and things are heated up with raids and attacks from Fulani herdsmen without security and protection, life is a lot messier than can be imagined. Those close to government insist: “Taraba State Government has put in relentless efforts to achieve the level of peace being enjoyed in the State before the ugly resurgence of herdsmen invading Communities and taking lives, destroying property and depriving people from going about their normal daily activities as witnessed in these few days.”⁶⁵ Underneath this effort is the repeated occurrence of violence which suggests that it is not being dealt with and harmonious relationship continues to suffer.

⁶² Vento, *Violence, Trauma, and Resistance*, 8.

⁶³ Shawn M. Copeland, "Presidential Address: Political Theology as Interruptive," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 59 (2012): 78.

⁶⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, sec.53.

⁶⁵ "Gov. Ishaku Meets Religious Leaders and Security Agencies," accessed February 26, 2017, <http://tarabastate.gov.ng/gov-ishaku-meets-religious-leaders-and-security-agencies/>.

When perpetrators and victims suppress the past and consciously strive to forget it, they build a destructive identity. This destructive identity can cause the stronger person, group or nation, to oppress the weaker person, group or nation, in order to find or maintain their identity. It is therefore possible that people with a lack of a sense of self-worth and identity, based on their selective memory, can justify almost everything to regain their identity, even if it entails oppressing others with violence or violating the rights of others.⁶⁶ Perpetrators use violence to get what they want. In return, victims of this violent behavior employ violence to retaliate, and in so doing the violence takes on a cycle character that soon spins out of control.⁶⁷ This is constantly seen as renewed attacks are noticed from Fulani herdsmen in Taraba. They have increased their attack on Christian and farming communities. The helplessness of the traditional institution and state government in handling these conflict situations and crisis leaves room for more question than answers. More over the apathy that exists among communities in Taraba is very toxic. With these kinds of frustration violence is inevitable. Relationships are compromised, it is only by addressing the pains of victims and perpetrators that progress can be made.

Metz argues that memory is indeed what gives people, both as individuals and as communities, their historical identity: “Identity is formed when memories are aroused.”⁶⁸ Metz goes even farther than Pope Francis. Where Francis encourages us to weep in solidarity with the victims of history, Metz emboldens us to complain. Suffering unto God entails crying out and grumbling, and culminates not in pious satisfaction but in more questions, a “passionate questioning that arises out of

⁶⁶ Thesnaar, *Memories Liberate the Past*, 535.

⁶⁷ Christo Thesnaar, “Healing the Scars: A Theological-Hermeneutical Analysis of Violence from the Perspective of both Perpetrators and Victims,” *Scriptura* 106 (2011): 27.

⁶⁸ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 66.

suffering, a questioning of God, full of highly charged expectation.”⁶⁹ Suffering does not provide you with any room to express yourself. You are in a sense forced to be silent and as you become more silent the more you tend to be isolated.⁷⁰

There are also, of course, ways in which grief can spiral inward into despair and outward into violence. Real grief must be voiced, the losses must be lamented, but we cannot stay only in grief. On the other hand, for all of the inspirational success stories from survivors at the official memorial, there is a danger of glossing over the real, deep, continuing pain many continue to suffer.⁷¹ The intensity of the emotions they are experiencing as well as the difficulty to communicate it should never be underestimated.⁷² Metz identifies with the traumatic experience of war from his background as a ‘dangerous memory,’ and strongly affirms that dangerous memories are memories in which earlier experiences flare up and unleash new dangerous insights for the present.⁷³ These resonate with the experiences of victims in Taraba constantly caught in this violent situation and have to bury their dead. Similarly, the experience that they cannot return to their farms land and have become displaced in their communities continue to bring back as Metz has noted new and surprising outcomes that perpetuate violence and blow up any trace of relationships.

Metz understands memory analogically as a capacity to remember various histories of the downtrodden and the dead. Memory also includes the specifically Christian memory of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These diverse

⁶⁹Susan Reynolds, “For There is Still a Vision: Metz’s Apocalyptic Eschatology and the Practice of Lament,” *Lumen et Vita* 5, no. 1 (2015): 5.

⁷⁰ Thesnaar, *Healing the Scars*, 32.

⁷¹ Christopher Welch, “Boston Strong: The Need for Prophetic Vision in Commemorating Tragic Violence,” Lecture, REA Annual Meeting, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, November 7-9, 2014, 4.

⁷² Thesnaar, *Healing the Scars*, 33.

⁷³ Baumgardt, *Opening First-World Catholic Theology to Third-World Ecofeminism*, 101.

ranges of memory are dialectically interrelated, variously exercising epistemological warrants as well as sociopolitical critiques.⁷⁴ The memory of Jesus, by contrast, generates empathy toward the sufferings of others and openness to their testimonies encourages the humiliated to tell their own stories, and holds open the threatening possibility for freedom. These memories not only resonate together and reinforce each other, they alter the socio personal imagination and mobilize political agency.⁷⁵ Metz's rejections undoubtedly illuminate the way in which the cry of dereliction is not a declaration of atheism but a protest on behalf of suffering humanity with whom Christ is joined irrevocably in shared suffering and grief.⁷⁶ Metz writes, "in this sense post idealist theology speaks of universal or universalizable interest, based on the biblical tradition itself. This is 'hunger and thirst for justice' and indeed, justice for all, for the living and the dead, present and past sufferings."⁷⁷ Notably, until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode.⁷⁸ To control this explosion Christians may learn to build loving relationships on the foundational theology of the Triune God.

Trinity and Relationship

Perhaps, Metz's theology is an attempt "at a first level of reflection" to demonstrate the truth and transformative power of Christian faith, but now within the arena of historical catastrophes and political struggle rather than that of the

⁷⁴ Derek Simon, "'No One, Not Even God, Can Take the Place of the Victim': Metz, Levinas, and Practical Christology after the Shoah," *Horizons* 26, no. 2 (1999): 198.

⁷⁵ Simon, *No One, Not Even God, Can Take the Place of the Victim*, 198.

⁷⁶ Marsden, *The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz*, 445.

⁷⁷ Kim, *Memory of Suffering as Continual Social Criticism*, 320.

⁷⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, sec.59.

individual's attempt to make sense of his or her own existence.⁷⁹ Metz writes "if we are concerned, then with the human situation, we have first to analyze this situation, since we cannot expect an analysis to be provided in advance either by theology or by any standardized philosophy."⁸⁰ As such, retrieval will pave way for critically addressing the damages done in ethnic and religious crisis as it seen in Taraba. The painful truth about the violence perpetuated in Taraba seeks remedies not in the unfortunate narrative that demonize ethnic identities on the grounds of political affiliations or religious ties but more in the lack of a solid glue of relationships. Communities in Taraba are bonded together by family ties, extended relations and deep marriages unions. These affiliations and ties transcend the borders of ethnicity and religion and are permanently glued together by love.

Such bounds of love are the ultimate recognition of God's creation, and it is manifested in interconnected relationships. This is clearly demonstrated in the Christian understanding of the trinity, a relationship of three persons in one God. Throughout Christian history, the idea that humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) has precipitated much thought and analysis. Theologians over the centuries have proposed numerous answers to the question of what exactly the image of God in human nature consists of. In the twentieth century this question came back to the forefront as a part of the renewed interest among theologians in the nature of the Trinity. These reflections on the Trinity, and the implications for human relationships, shed light on the way we understand relationships.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ashley, J. Matthew, "Johann Baptist Metz," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds. Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 247.

⁸⁰ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 3.

⁸¹ Lynne Baab, "Toward a Theology of the Internet: Place, Relationship and Sin," accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.lynnabaab.com/articles/new-toward-a-theology-of-the-internet-pl>.

Selfishness, mistrust and domination damaged relationships can hinder friendship. On the other hand, love, trust and servant hood nurture relationships and encourage fellowship.⁸² “Love must be understood as an unconditional will to create just relationships and structures.”⁸³ Clearly what matter most is relationship and the Bible’s story and message must be seen through “relationship glasses.” In the process, the Cappadocians made a provocative philosophical move by defining God’s being primarily in terms of relationship.⁸⁴ While asserting the common divine ousia (the ‘what’ of God), they placed equal emphasis on how God is God (as three persons in relationship). In the seventh century, John of Damascus applied the term perichoresis (‘circulating around’) to the Trinity as a way to describe the interdependent, dynamic, mutual indwelling of the three persons. This social understanding of the Trinity came to dominate the eastern theological tradition.⁸⁵ The Trinity defines the Christian's personal and communal existence through its own consummate relationality even as it fundamentally reveals the character of God. It is in the divine perichoretic dance of participation that we find the source for the theonomous self, a self that is neither self-determined (autonomous) nor completely other-determined (heteronomous), but ‘named with reference to its origin and destiny in God.’⁸⁶ This divine source of relationship can be replicated in the challenge to combat the devastation of ethnic religious crisis in Taraba and create a path towards peace and development.

Since Christian understanding of human personhood receives its shape and pattern from the triune God. The human vocation is to learn to see and act rightly by

⁸² “Relationships in theology,” accessed December 8, 2016, <http://life-mission.org/blog/2006/08/relationship-theology/>.

⁸³ Henson, *The Church in the Context of Political Theology*, 54.

⁸⁴ Dwight J. Zscheile, "The Trinity, Leadership, and Power," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 6, no. 2 (2007): 45.

⁸⁵ Zscheile, *The Trinity, Leadership, and Power*, 45.

⁸⁶ Mark S. Medley, "Do This: The Eucharist and Ecclesial Selfhood," *Review & Expositor* 100, no. 3 (2003): 384.

participating in the mystery of the triune life of God. Moreover, knowing the triune God and learning how to see and act rightly are inseparable from participating in the Christian community and its practices.⁸⁷ “Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things. Therefore man is split within himself. As a result, all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, man finds that by himself he is incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though he is bound by chains.”⁸⁸

To unbound the chains of memory and open up for sharing and healing of memories, Metz proposes beginning with meal sharing: a meal is embedded in relationships, and memory is a significant part. Hence, Metz’s adoption of ‘dangerous memory,’ engages the Eucharist to interrogate the Jesus’ practice of table fellowship, which exemplifies his practice of befriending persons who were despised, marginalized, and forsaken. Even today, in the practice of the Eucharist a similar structure is maintained. To gather as brothers and sisters in friendship and to extend the friendship of God by befriending the broken, violated, abused and dispossessed.⁸⁹ “Thus, even though there is brokenness and alienation in the world, in societies, in families and relationships, and, yes, sadly, in the Church, the Eucharist should prompt

⁸⁷ Medley, *Do This: The Eucharist and Ecclesial Selfhood*, 383.

⁸⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 13.

⁸⁹ Medley, *Do This: The Eucharist and Ecclesial Selfhood*, 394.

the Church to be an agent of reconciliation and healing not only among its members, but also for the world.”⁹⁰

That is to say, the remembrance structure that Metz wants Christian to bring to contemporary society is a frame of mind wherein they consider the narratives and images of the lost and dead, of those presently silent and marginalized, to be essential to decision and action taken in the economic, political, technological, and educational arenas. With the service of the Lord’s day functioning as the source and summit of their lives, they find not only the courage and strength but also the desire and aptitude for joining fellow citizens in the ethics of remembering, which opens up a space from which the work of justice can move forth.⁹¹ In this example, there is the privileging of contemporary experience, the use of interdisciplinary methods to understand that experience, critical dialogue between theology and experience, the adoption of liberal or radical theological models that highlight and question contemporary injustice, and the need to make a difference to understanding and practice.⁹²

Narratives of death can appear sovereign, but Christians believe that these sagas of diminishment will not prevail because the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus make possible a new way of life in which the logic of violence is exposed and overcome. This life-giving narrative entered the world in Christ and should continue to be told by all those baptized in his name. In this story, people build one another up, support and care for one another, seek the best for each other, and offer forgiveness when they fail. In this story, people acknowledge the things that foster division and

⁹⁰ Paul J. Wadell, "Sharing Peace: Discipline and Trust," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 294.

⁹¹ Bruce T Morrill, "Anamnetic Action: The Ethics of Remembrancing," *Doxology* 17 (2000): 22.

⁹² Stephen Pattison and Gordon Lynch, "Pastoral and Practical Theology," in *The Modern Theologians An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 3rd edition, eds. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 413.

nurture breakdowns in love, but commit to cultivating instead the demanding but truly hopeful disciplines of love, truthfulness, patience, and forgiveness.⁹³ Therefore, Metz argues that “a church that is maturing into a universal cultural polycentrism must treat and implement the biblical inheritance primarily as the basis of a hermeneutical culture.”⁹⁴ Biblical understandings of others, the memory of suffering, and the radical claim of the Kingdom of God offer a wider background against which the deeper structure of universal principles for human rights, social justice and political emancipation of humanity can be known and practiced.⁹⁵ Metz articulates not simply intellectual knowledge, but its marriage with the unknowing that reveals wisdom: real strength and real freedom know that we are utterly reliant on God, unable to be satisfied by anything less than the divine.⁹⁶

In the first part of this chapter, it offered a more specific investigation within the parameters of Metz’s critical contribution to theology: memory and relationships with elements of continuity as well as rupture. In the second section of the chapter, the interest was to problematize this ‘notion of dangerous memories.’ As a result, it must be noted, in passing, two specific and contrasting concerns: firstly, the persistence of the cry of the innocents and the pains of those caught in ethno religious tension in Taraba. Also, it is necessary to note the practical imperative of speaking effectively of relationships within and to a culture that maintains a morbid fascination with the theme of stability and peace, as well as an understandably deep-seated resistance to it. The chapter asks whether our understanding of violence can be reformulated so as to better satisfy this concerns. Since ethno religious violence as

⁹³ Wadell, *Sharing Peace: Discipline and Trust*, 289.

⁹⁴ Kim, *Memory of Suffering as Continual Social Criticism*, 329.

⁹⁵ Kim, *Memory of Suffering as Continual Social Criticism*, 329.

⁹⁶ Emma Pierce, "A Dichotomy of Freedom," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 11.

seen remains a weakness of relationships, the specific proposal is that an articulation of the Trinitarian notion of relationships and the Eucharist as the home of filiations may actually do much of the work of reconciliation and healing of memories, which is required from the practice of relationship.

Dangerous memories and the ethnic religious experiences of those involved in the conflicts in Taraba require a reset. The struggle is, how does the '*memoria passionis*' as provocatively thought by Metz as a concept from the Christian tradition be translated into today's secularized culture? This is what the next chapter looks forward to do.

Chapter Five: Rising from the Ashes: Revisiting Narratives of Crisis in Taraba

Introduction

Chapter 5 explores narratives, another critical category in the theological reflection on violence in Nigeria and the “dialogue of life” as a Catholic response. Africans are storytellers *par excellence*. Stories play a critical role in framing and reproducing African culture. The rich oral tradition is central to the dynamism of African culture and social relationships. Such stories are rich in proverbs, idioms, and sayings. They reflect the lived wisdom of the people in everyday life. The African approach to story reflects something similar in the Christian scriptures as well as in hagiography, conversion accounts, and other stories of believers, catechists, and leaders at all levels. Such stories of the everyday experience of relationship among Catholics at the grassroots promote the dialogue of life. In this chapter, attention is given to the narratives of horrendous human suffering. Drawing from Metz exposition of narratives, attention is given to those who champion the cause of victims and expose the terror of ethnic religious violence in Taraba.

Narrative Framework

This research offers three narrative structures to provide a critical platform for transformation regarding ethno religious violence in Taraba. These are the narratives of suffering, power analysis, and social change. Therefore, a narrative framework affords this examination a special access to the human experience of time and change and the obligation to harken to the human impulse to share their stories. The intent here is to problematize the intersection of narratives and stories for transformation in the continuing quest for solutions to the ethno religious violence and contested realities of Taraba.

Metz acknowledges the need for reference to narratives and the practical structure of theology.¹ Such reference to narrative would constitute a framework for an exposition of the suffering of a people. This narrative framework examines the reality of suffering:

By drawing on the interpretative power of the symbols of the Christian tradition, are fashioning a theology for the here and now. This is a theology which takes its starting point on the margins of our world, and on the margins of our society. It is a theology which comes into being where there are people who are struggling to make sense of their experience of discrimination and deprivation.²

The use of narratives has been identified as a powerful strategy that can contribute potentially to improved quality of health care as well as to the development of new knowledge.³ Especially, “when faced with particularly new and challenging innovations or concepts, one of the most powerful tools to adapt our mental construct is a good narrative.”⁴ However, it is important to recognize that narratives are constructed, contested, shaped, and reshaped. Indeed, some narratives become hegemonic while others are abandoned and eventually forgotten. Specifically, narratives can be especially decisive when they contribute to demarcating who belongs to a certain community and who is excluded from it. But on the whole, narration helps us to define and frame new ideas. It integrates the novelty and

¹ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1981), 205.

² Robin Green and Theo Simpson, "A Site of Struggle," *Theology* 93, no. 756 (1990): 463.

³ Richard W. Redman, "The Power of Narratives," *Research and Theory for Nursing Practice* 19, no. 1 (2005): 5.

⁴ Vicent Lassale, "The power of Narratives," June 10, 2016, What Happens Now? section, accessed January 28, 2017, <http://www.whathappensnow.xyz/lessonsblog/2016/6/10/the-power-of-narratives>.

unfamiliarity into the rest of our existing understanding about the world, using both our intuitive and rational minds. Therefore, it can be properly held that human beings are literally hardwired for narrative. Stories are the threads of our lives and weave together to form the fabric of human cultures. A story can inform or deceive, enlighten or entertain, or all of the above at once. We live in a world shaped by stories.⁵

By definition, a narrative or story is an account of an individual experience that seeks to make sense of events or actions in their life. It provides a structure for reflection that places key events in the context of the human experience. When people hear someone's story, they have a better understanding of these persons as individuals, the experience they have had, and the effect it has had on them. It provides people with an opportunity to know much more about other people more than what they see or what they may have read about them.⁶ To put more emphasis on the importance of storytelling, the African American theologian, James Cone states:

Every people have a story to tell, something to say to themselves, their children, and to the world about how they think and live, as they determine their reason for being...when people can no longer listen to other people's stories, they become enclosed within their own social context and then they feel they must destroy other people's stories.⁷

⁵ Patrick Reinsborough and Doyle Canning, "Theory: Narrative Power Analysis," accessed January 27, 2017, <http://beautifultrouble.org/theory/narrative-power-analysis/>.

⁶ Redman, *The Power of Narratives*, 6.

⁷ Christo Thesnaar, "Healing the Scars: A Theological-Hermeneutical Analysis of Violence from the Perspectives of both Perpetrators and Victims: General," *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa* 106 (2011): 30.

It is clear that human beings cannot survive without a narrative of identity.⁸ This reflects the imprints that Metz both relates' to, accepts, and underscores. The belief which suggests that established natural constructs are simply limited. They must be expanded, accompanied and repackaged by taking sides with the method which comprise of more relations than I-thou encounters with the other. But through a conflicted and contested past with an inherent mechanism that has become universal.⁹ Similarly, viewed within certain limits, "Metz thus desires a transformation of the contemporary subject into a true religious subject, a transformation which he sees as identical to the struggle for God."¹⁰

In this work narratives and stories are used interchangeably. Occasions will arise where stories are the narratives, and storytelling is the acts or actions as the case may suggests. Storytelling has the ability to help a person to understand the past. No wonder, it is called the 'sense-making function' of a narrative. It also helps a person to remember and not to forget, and it empowers a person to own the story of another person as his/her own. It is the only basis for recognizing and yet transcending human differences. Again, it can also be the only basis for gaining an understanding of both oneself and the hopes and fears of others. Victims and perpetrator become part of one another's stories.¹¹ According to Villa-Vicencio, storytelling is the only basis on which different stories, different memories and different histories can emerge as the

⁸ Arthur D.S.W. Dorbin, "Am I right? Story-telling is Necessary for Human Survival," *Psychology Today*, August 07, 2013, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/am-i-right/201308/story-telling-is-necessary-human-survival>.

⁹Matthew J. Ashley, "Johann Baptist Metz," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds. Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 247.

¹⁰ Marie Michon Matthiesen, "Narrative of Suffering: Complementary Reflections of Theological Anthropology in Johann Metz and Elie Wiesel," *Religion & Literature* 18, no. 2 (1986): 48.

¹¹ Thesnaar, *Healing the Scars*, 30.

basis for an inclusive nation-building exercise. To tell your story means that you are able to find and shape yourself through the stories of others. The power of storytelling is not just an individual process, but also a collective one.¹²

Storytelling has the ability to give people insight in their own situation, to change their behavior and to create new paradigms for a new, healthy life. Telling stories is therefore intrinsic to claiming one's identity and in this process finding impulses of hope. Rituals, symbols and metaphors are included within the journey to emphasize the fact that as human beings people need to deal with the past before they can move on.¹³ Like stories, narratives appeal to human emotions and imaginations. They make lofty concepts tangible and immediate, almost forcing people to engage with them. Stories are restricted (they have a beginning, middle and end) and about someone else, while narratives are open-ended and unresolved; their resolution depends upon one's own choices and actions. They are about individuals and the role they can play. Although narratives exist at the individual level, social and institutional narratives are what draw people together and can drive and shape their choices toward a long-term vision.¹⁴

Stories or narratives have long connections in human history. The use of stories, or narratives, was described more than 2,000 years ago by Aristotle.¹⁵ Through the ages, stories have been used as a technique to illustrate a moral, to demonstrate how experiences have produced positive or negative outcomes, and to entertain. Every culture has its fairy tales, fables, and oral traditions that are

¹² Thesnaar, *Healing the Scars*, 30.

¹³ Thesnaar, *Healing the Scars*, 30.

¹⁴ John Hagel, "Making Detroit a Moment: The Power of Narratives," August 26, 2015, Techonomy Exclusive, accessed 27 January, 2017, <http://techonomy.com/2015/08/making-detroit-a-movement-the-power-of-narrative/>.

¹⁵ Plato, *Republic*, Book 2, section 377c.

transmitted from one generation to another.¹⁶ Frequently, one hears someone say "tell me your story" when they meet or are focused around a particular issue. As a result, it is important to engage with Metz's category of narrative as a central quest to this inquiry.

Metz and Narrative

The narratives emanating from "the ongoing conflict in Taraba State is a complex phenomenon where thousands of Christians as well as Muslims are being killed and displaced. In most cases, the conflict is oversimplified, under researched, or completely neglected."¹⁷ This section of the work seeks to engage the ethno religious crisis that engulf Taraba State and interrogates it in light of Metz's critical insights on the power of narrative in dialogue of life.

Metz fundamental theological perspectives yield critical insights into how narrative serves as a hermeneutical key for understanding human consciousness, identity, and interactions. Therefore, "Metz argues that narrative has a proper form, so narrative should be a main language of theology. As memory has a social and historical dimension, narrative also has a historical and social dimension."¹⁸ Metz's insistence on references to the narrative and practical structure of theology has been a consistent theme. Overall, the stress has been on the narrative structure of the category of dangerous memory.¹⁹ Indeed, Metz has increasingly come to insist that theology's job is not so much to assimilate these remembrances into a system as it is

¹⁶ Redman, *The Power of Narratives*, 5.

¹⁷ Abdulbarkindo Adamu and Alupse Ben, "Violent Conflict in Divided Societies the Case Study of Violent Conflict in Taraba State (2013 - 2015): The Deeper Reality of the Violent Conflict in Taraba State and the Plight of Christians," *Nigeria Conflict and Security Analysis Network Working Paper 2* (2015): 6.

¹⁸ Jin-Hyok Kim, "Memory of Suffering as Continual Social Criticism: The Political Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz in Relation to the Challenges of Modernity," *Korean Journal of Systematic Theology* 36, no. 9(2013): 324.

¹⁹ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 205.

to provide a language in which they can be articulated and allowed to irritate the “modern” consciousness.²⁰

The retrieval of memory can play a significant role as the ground of public discourse. However, to develop his anthropological and practical concept of memory, Metz supplements the two vital categories of narrative-solidarity, forming a dynamic "trinity," so to speak, of memory-narrative-solidarity. Metz's particular emphasis on the narration of suffering by the non-subject provides an important dimension for the recent formation of narrative theology.²¹ Hence, Metz, at least after 1985 and in accord with his narrative-practical approach, seems to have left no room for posing classic metaphysical questions. Rather, on a more reflective-theoretical level, he goes no further than an affirmation that the history of suffering comprises dangerous memories which, when spoken out, recall to people God's universal salvific will (which would then underpin the subjectivity of all).²² To a large extent, “this narrative perspective in theology takes account of and reflects what has been called the 'narrative quality of experience', that our self-understanding rests in 'narrative identity', that we are 'entangled in stories'.”²³ Metz further articulates that ‘most story tellers pursue a practical interest.’ This means that underneath these stories are ‘a moral practical instruction, a rule of life.’²⁴ To which in rather unique ways, “it present this interest and tries it out in the narrative process. It verifies or falsifies itself

²⁰ Ashley, *Johann Baptist Metz*, 245.

²¹ Matthiesen, Michon Marie, "Narrative of Suffering: Complementary Reflections of Theological Anthropology in Johann Metz and Elie Wiesel," *Religion & Literature* 18, no. 2 (1986): 48.

²² Lieven Boeve, “Thinking Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context: A Playground for Theological Renewal,” in *Sacramental Presence in a Post Modern Context*, eds. L. Boeve and L. Leijssen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 13.

²³ Heinz Streib, “Autobiographical Reflection and Faith Development: Prospects for Religious Education,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 14, no. 1 (1991): 43.

²⁴ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 207.

and does not simply leave this to discussion about the story which lies outside the narrative process.”²⁵

The “Judaean-Christian faith has a narrative depth structure as Metz points out.”²⁶ This structures the way in which reflection on the relationship in which God is engaged with God's creation takes place. It is indeed through the encounter with concrete others and otherness that the Christian narrative is challenged and interrupted. An interruption, therefore, has the potential to become the locus in which God is revealed to Christians today, urging them to break open their narratives to bear witness to this divine interruption.²⁷ These stories break through the spell of a total reconstruction based on abstract reason. They show that human consciousness is a consciousness entwined in stories that have to rely on narrative identification and, when the relative importance or the magisterium of history has been recognized, cannot entirely do without the magisterium or stories.²⁸

The stories must be related to the daily experiences of people and then connected to their worship. As Metz argues, “above all, it should also be possible to relate the sacramental action more closely to stories of life and suffering and to reveal it as a saving narrative.”²⁹ Only when the memory of suffering is bound to the memory of the Easter, in which Christ not only conquers fear and death but also brings to humanity a possibility of renewed life, it can truly transform the life of the world, liberates those who are enslaved, and offers people a reason for hope.³⁰

²⁵ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 208.

²⁶ Edmund Arens, “What is Religion, and What is Religion for? Thoughts in Light of Communicative Theology,” *Bogoslovska smotra* 78, no. 1 (2008): 20.

²⁷ Lieven Boeve, “The Interruption of Political Theology,” in *The Future of Political Theology Religious and Theological Perspectives*, ed. Peter Losonczy Ku et al. (Belgium: Ashgate, 2011), 54.

²⁸ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 214.

²⁹ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 208.

³⁰ Kim, “Memory of Suffering as Continual Social Criticism,” 332.

Therefore, by narrating faith stories implies their interpretation and contextualization to contemporary situations of action; narration makes an invitation to a conversation. It is an invitation to imagine the present situation and to act therein in a particular way.

Telling God's stories and faith stories is communicative-religious practice because religion lives, remains alive, and is handed down in these stories, because its contents and intentions are remembered and actualized by and in them.³¹ There should be no mistake about this for "an integral part of history is the suffering experience of non-identity through violence and oppression, injustice and inequality, guilt, finiteness and death. In this sense, history is always a history of suffering."³²

Narrative of Suffering

Contesting narratives play a crucial role in ethno-political conflicts, with each side adopting a narrative that justifies its own claims, demands, and position while delegitimizing those of the other side.³³ In this work, the narratives of suffering draw inspiration from the growing body of reflexive literature which seeks to critique the dominant narrow gaze of ethnic relations and religious tension prevalent in Taraba. The fact is "human suffering is both individual and collective, both local and global, and further the notion of social suffering has helped to emphasize the nexus between the physical and emotional pain of people battling with chronic poverty, social marginalization, and routinized violence."³⁴ Metz believes that this "memory of

³¹ Arens, "What is Religion, and What is Religion for?" 20-21.

³² Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 211.

³³ Ron Yiftach, and Ifat Maoz, "Dangerous Stories: Encountering Narratives of the Other in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 19, no. 3 (2013): 281.

³⁴ Mark Brough, Robert Schweitzer, Jane Shakespeare-Finch, Lyn Vromans and Julie King, "Unpacking the Micro–Macro Nexus: Narratives of Suffering and Hope among Refugees from Burma recently settled in Australia," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 26, no. 2 (2013): 207-225.

suffering . . . brings a new moral imagination into political life, a new vision of others' suffering that should mature into a generous, uncalculating partisanship on behalf of the weak and unrepresented."³⁵ So, in the midst of dislocations and relocations, personal and collective storytelling can become one way in which people claim new identities and assert their participation in the public sphere.³⁶ Furthermore, "the ethics of public life insist that suffering invites compassion, it must be acted on and on the spot if it is to be an effective response to the urgency of human pain."³⁷

The conflict in Taraba State has been hidden from Boko Haram's³⁸ confrontation. However, it had to compete with ethno-religious and political crises that has left many a people abandoned. The nearly ten thousand internally displaced persons (IDP) in the state are drawn from both the rebellion or ethno religious crises wrecking havoc in Taraba. This has crippled the existing framework of the state.³⁹ Reports suggest that the nomadic Fulani cattle herders, who are predominantly Muslim, are frequently the perpetrators of acts of banditry. On the other hand, sedentary farmer communities, consisting of several other ethnic groups that are generally non-Muslim, are the victims of the banditry. This division lays claims to a

³⁵ Mark Chmiel, "Confronting the Blood-Stained Face of History: Removing the Log from our Eyes," *New Theology Review* (2004): 42.

³⁶ Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, "Conjunctions: Life, Narratives in the Field of Human Rights," *Biography* 27, no. 1(2004): 6.

³⁷ Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Spectator of Suffering* (London: Sage publication, 2006), 2.

³⁸ Boko Haram is an Islamist extremist group responsible for dozens of massacres of civilians and the abduction of more than 500 women and girls in its five-year insurgency in Nigeria. Boko Haram promotes a version of Islam which makes it "haram," or forbidden, for Muslims to take part in any political or social activity associated with Western society. 'The bombing of the United Nations office in Abuja is perhaps what the insurgents used to gain global recognition; as they are now listed amongst terrorist organizations by the United States and its allies.' See Felix Akpan, Okonette Ekanem and Angela Olofu- Adeoye, "Boko Haram Insurgency and the Counter-Terrorism Policy in Nigeria," *Canadian Social Science* 10, no. 2 (2014): 151.

³⁹ Sylvanus Viashima, "Suffering, Anguish Pervade Taraba IDPs' Camp" *The Sun*, October 10, 2016, <http://sunnewsonline.com/suffering-anguish-pervade-taraba-idps-camp/>.

perspective of the social, religious and ethnic characteristics of these rural communities framed into expansive essentialist discourses that actively breed and sustain suspicion and distrust. This resulting negative stereotyping leads to further ethnic and religious bigotry, culminating in a succession of attacks and counter or revenge attacks between these different groups. In the end, property is destroyed, communities are dislocated, lives are lost, instability increased, and misery grown. Then the government steps in with some relief materials and a promise that the perpetrators will be found prosecuted, but there is almost never any follow up action in that regard. Meanwhile, the positions of opposing groups harden and the conflicts become ever more intractable.⁴⁰

In the light of these challenges, “Vatican II, launched a reexamination of the church in the modern world and through *Nostra Aetate*, reversed the church’s historic anti semetic policies. Such theologian as Johannes Baptist Metz has provided theological tools that have helped the Church to respond critically to its own contributions in support of political brutality.”⁴¹ Metz critiques all abstract theologies that do not recognize the socially critical character of faith. In the process, Metz rejects any type of theodicy, for example, that attributes suffering to the logical or ultimately benevolent progress of history. The kind of faith that is plausible in the face of brutality, he feels, is the prophetic model of faith found in the Bible, which directly responds to individual and collective suffering.⁴² However, Metz visualize in the Hebrew Bible the original embodiment of faith language and hence the source and

⁴⁰ Jibrin Ibrahim and Kop'ep Dabugat, “Rural Banditry and Hate Speech in Northern Nigeria: Fertile Ground for the Construction of Dangerous Narratives in the Media,” in *Rural Banditry and Conflicts in Northern Nigeria*, eds. Mohammed J. Kuna and Jibrin Ibrahim (Abuja: Center for Democracy and Development, 2015), 258-259.

⁴¹ Donald J. Dietrich, "The Holocaust, Genocide, and the Catholic Church," in *Confronting Genocide: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*, ed. Steven Leonard Jacobs (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009): 256.

⁴² Dietrich, *The Holocaust, Genocide, and the Catholic Church*, 259.

model for a faith response to suffering. For him, the narratives of this Bible are rooted in dangerous memories, because in response to the oppression of the poor, we are reminded of those persons who protested suffering and anticipated the possibility of political change in history with hope, solidarity, and resistance. For Christians, the resurrection can also be a dangerous memory that signifies the overcoming of injustice, the release from oppression, and the promise of human freedom for all in the course of moving toward God's kingdom.⁴³

By exposing the narratives of suffering been uncovered in and made popular from the sufferings of victims in the Taraba conflicts, lessons are learned and a broader picture is exposed. Scholars studying the gravity and intensity of the conflict have collected data particularly in southern and central Taraba which point to the massive suffering in the land.⁴⁴ Other areas studied in relation to this conflict include the boundary between Taraba and Benue states, Taraba and Adamawa states, Taraba and Plateau states as well as the Nigeria-Cameroon border region in southern Adamawa where thousands of indigenous Christian farmers displaced from Taraba State are taking refuge.⁴⁵ The first set of data presented in these studies show that the total number of Christians killed in northern and central Taraba between December 2013 and July 2015 was 1,195 persons. Some local observers maintain that the number could be much higher than what is presented above.⁴⁶

Besides those people killed in the crisis are those who are internally displaced: becoming refugees in their homelands. Internally displaced persons in parts of the

⁴³ Dietrich, *The Holocaust, Genocide, and the Catholic Church*, 260.

⁴⁴ In 2013-2015, a group of scholars embarked on journey to uncover the incessant attacks on Christian in Taraba state. The penetrating search and investigation lead to the production of a report which has been published. Their data is particularly helpful in situating the context of this work.

⁴⁵ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 16.

⁴⁶ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 19.

country have two reasons to be sorrowful: having been deprived the comfort of their homes as a result of killings and wanton destruction; they must now live with ignominy, the victims of humanity's common inhumanity.⁴⁷ Having carefully unveiled reports presented from the above mentioned studies, "the narratives examined demonstrate the proliferation of violence, connection with popular culture and sexuality and the theological connections to sacred and secular narratives."⁴⁸ Those engaged in these conflicts must be made to be more conscious of the violence and decide to live their lives differently.⁴⁹

It behooves on the church that carries the dangerous memory of Jesus to lead the way of initiating an inviting space for narration of suffering. In particular the interest promoting and perpetuating Catholic social thought in Taraba must remain attentive to the terms on which the narrative of social reconstruction continues to remain in play, whether as ongoing, or as now a past historical epoch which remains of analogical significance to life in the state.⁵⁰ Christians, while committed to the pursuit of the common good, must not be too starry eyed about the human ability to transform the face of the earth. Progress can and should be made, to be sure, but whatever advances are made will always remain a modest contribution to God's 'new creation.' Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* rightly points out, "strive as we may, the ills and troubles that beset human life will never be banished as long as history continues to run its course."⁵¹ However, 'suffering may take on many different forms and

⁴⁷ Alemma-Ozioruva Aliu, Musa Njadvara and Charles Akpeji, "Double trouble for displaced persons," *Guardian Newspaper*, July 10, 2016, <https://guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/double-trouble-for-displaced-persons/>.

⁴⁸ Cheryl A. Kirkduggan, *Violence and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 68.

⁴⁹ Kirkduggan, *Violence and Theology*, 84.

⁵⁰ William J. Wagner, "Unlocking Catholic Social Doctrine: Narratives as Key." *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 7, no. 2 (2010): 303.

⁵¹ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, sec.18

shapes.’ True communication with the sufferer ought to be existential, action-oriented, and conversational.’ Unfortunately, ‘the modern man looks at suffering as something totally negative, something to be avoided at all costs.’⁵² In particular, the seemingly taken for granted, western neo-liberal cultural assumptions of transforming the social, political and economic realities of everyday living into the western idiom of ‘stress’ need to be acknowledged as a specific cultural response rather than an acultural, universalist construct.⁵³ The subtext of a power narrative has to be discerned in every particular situation because it underlies the sufferings of the people.

Narrative of Power

One of the causes for the incessant conflicts in Taraba is dominance. Very importantly, and given that: “Christians are thus victims of a strategy to implement the Islamic policy of dominating and ruling over Christian and non-Muslim territories. They are also victims of an effort to sustain the colonial legacy that gave undue advantage to the Hausa-Fulani Muslim hegemony over the Middle Belt region, a territory to which Taraba State belongs.”⁵⁴ The strategy is been actualized on three different level: “the first level is domination through traditional institutions, the second level is domination through political control and the third level is domination through violence, in this case, the use of Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen to displace and dispossess indigenous Christian communities of their land and properties.”⁵⁵ To recall, there were moments in history, when it was a known fact that:

⁵² Joseph L. C. Tham, “Communicating with Sufferers: Lessons from the Book of Job,” *Christ Bioeth* 19, no. 1 (2013): 82-99.

⁵³ Brough et al, *Unpacking the Micro–Macro Nexus*, 3.

⁵⁴ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 54.

⁵⁵ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 54.

Ethnic and cultural difference was central to indirect rule because of the centrality of tradition and customs to its working. The standard argument identifies a key site of struggles over ethnicity and culture: the bureaucratization of “created” or reified ethnic difference, the witting and unwitting imputation of privilege and marginality into these categories of ethnic difference, and the colonial and postcolonial appropriation of difference as a claim-making device by Africans.⁵⁶

The above shows the depth of how this quest for dominance is sustained, through a constant narrative that breeds tension made popular by ethno religious cleavages and conflicts in Taraba. Specifically, “considering that ethnic formations are perhaps the most historically enduring behavioral units in the country, and were further reinforced by the colonial and post-colonial regimes”⁵⁷ for power domination this partly explains the persistent nature of the conflict in Taraba State. This has had serious consequences for both colonial power relations, inter-ethnic group relations and the crisis cum contests that it triggered. This postcolonial backdrop of increasing ethno-religious tensions within the nation animates the analysis this dissertation makes of the crisis in Taraba State. Much of the literature focused on the conflict in Taraba tends to highlight its political dimensions or the heightened animosity between settlers and indigenes. Little attention is paid to the various ethnic groups in the state, and the causes of the recent clashes between Muslims and Christians.

Although religious splits between a Muslim and a Christian are often invoked as the main source of political tension, these seemingly neat regional divides do not

⁵⁶Moses Ochonu, "Colonialism within Colonialism: The Hausa-Caliphate imaginary and the British colonial administration of the Nigerian Middle Belt," *African Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 2-3 (2008): 96.

⁵⁷Eghosa E. Osaghae and Rotimi T. Suberu, *A History of Identities, Violence, and Stability in Nigeria* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2006), 9.

always map cleanly onto religious or ethnic divisions and do not fully capture the highly fragmented religious, ethnic, and regional differences which sometimes result in communal disputes in the Taraba.⁵⁸ Instead they convey a knack for showing what narrative will persist more and generate the underlying outcome put out by its perpetrators. Those seeking political power, control and dominance pride themselves in these narratives, while those caught in this dynamics of power, interest and dominance suffer from its wreck less outcomes. The fact is Christians are a majority in the state, which translates to numbers which are essential for securing votes in an election. Ultimately, leading to wins in elections, in various capacities in the state. This means political power is lost to Christians and this serves as a serious impediment to carrying out this overall hidden agenda that has been operative surreptitiously. It is easy to see why this prejudiced and disturbing history continues to play out even today in the conflicts in Taraba.

It is important to note that “for Metz, finally, the idea of God is itself political: all human beings are subjects before God and this belief requires a fight against oppression.”⁵⁹ By making connection to subjects before God and oppression shows his productive use of tensions is particularly instructive. Since, “Metz echoes these assertions from the perspective of political theology, with, however, a particular emphasis. Narrative is the category in terms of which people integrate and communicate experience to themselves as well as to others. It is for him the crucial genre within which the biblical vision of human identity, of what threatens it and how

⁵⁸ Oluwakemi Monsurat Balogun, "Contesting Nationalisms: Gender, Globalization, and Cultural Representation in Nigerian Beauty Pageants" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 6.

⁵⁹ Miguel Yaksic, "Religious Convictions in Political Discourse: Moral and Theological Grounds for a Public Theology in a Plural World" (PhD diss., Boston College, Chestnut Hill, 2010), 26.

it is saved, is disclosed.”⁶⁰ For example, Metz's preference for storytelling to argument seems to be born of the conviction that Christian faith can only be made intelligible to the modern world if it is presented in a non theoretical way. This is why he says that people must learn to recognize the fact that stories of conversion, exodus, and the like are not simply ‘dramatic embellishments of a previously conceived ‘pure’ theology’ but rather form the ‘basic structure’ of theology.⁶¹

Hence, the narrative of power analysis has provided the framework to extend power analysis into the narrative space. Here, it adopts the intangible realm of stories, ideas, and assumptions that frame public perception of the situation and the players in question. Such narrative helps define what is normal and what is legitimate, as well as the limits of what is politically possible. All power relations have such a narrative component.⁶² Narrative of power analysis is based on the recognition that the currency of story is not truth, but has meaning. This means that what makes a story powerful is not necessarily facts, but how the story creates meaning in the hearts and minds of the listeners. Therefore, the obstacle to convincing people is often not what they don’t know yet! But actually what they already do know. In other words, people’s existing assumptions and beliefs can act as narrative filters to prevent them from hearing social change messages. A narrative of power analysis seeks to unearth the hidden building blocks of these pernicious narratives, so that a narrative of liberation can better challenge them.⁶³

In the ethnographic, historical and linguistic literature of Taraba, masks the plan of domination. Similarly, underneath the guise of tensions, crisis and violence is

⁶⁰ Matthew J. Ashley, "Reading the Universe Story Theologically: The Contribution of a Biblical Narrative Imagination," *Theological Studies* 71, no. 4 (2010):875.

⁶¹ Paul Lauritzen, “Is ‘Narrative’ Really a Panacea? The Use of ‘Narrative’ in the Work of Metz and Hauerwas,” *The Journal of Religion* 67, no. 3 (1987): 328.

⁶² Reinsborough and Canning, *Theory: Narrative Power Analysis*.

⁶³ Reinsborough and Canning, *Theory: Narrative Power Analysis*.

the continued intentions of the Hausa Fulani group to dominate Taraba through institutions. Also, another similar intention was through trade and commerce: “There was also interest in controlling trade routes and taking slaves to increase the revenue of the caliphate. Yet, it is the indigenous ethnic groups that paid the price.”⁶⁴

Therefore, the prevailing narrative is:

In fact, for many people the atrocities committed by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen can be, at best, described as ethnic cleansing, and at worst, as genocide. This is because, from the evidence presented, there is a deliberate and calculated infliction of physical destruction, targeted at particular religious and ethnic groups. Such destruction is supported and driven by a religious supremacist ideology to ensure Islam dominates all aspects of life in Taraba State.⁶⁵

As Metz notes, the destruction of memory leads to a loss of identity as subject; ‘The reverse is also true - identity is formed when memories are aroused.’ The subjectivity of the poor and oppressed ‘almost always begins with their breaking through the power of the official idea of history by exposing it as propaganda on the part of those who rule them.’ So, for memory to operate as both a category of historical identity and a category of liberation, it is necessary that such dangerous memories and subjugated knowledge must also be recovered and aroused. As already indicated, the modes of recognition and recovery of the dangerous memories and subjugated knowledge in the biblical tradition can take various forms. These include the "behind the text" (sociological and historical) modes of reading, the "textual" (literary and narratological) modes of reading, and the "in front of the text" (thematic and metaphorical) modes of reading. Applying these forms of interpretations,

⁶⁴ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 52-53.

⁶⁵ Adamu and Ben, *Violent Conflict in Divided Societies*, 52-53.

recovered suppressed memories are not only remembered but also aroused most especially in the context of war and reconstruction.⁶⁶

Taken simply as stories that still have life-transforming potential, biblical narratives are intelligible, relevant, and distinctive. They are intelligible because they continue to have the power to shape and direct lives. They are relevant because such stories are intimately connected to practical social action, and they are distinctive because they are not just any old stories, but stories about the Christian God that cannot be reduced to any universal human message without loss of content.⁶⁷ This is why “a well-crafted narrative can incorporate these elements, while also helping to motivate many disparate people and resources and refocus them on the long-term.”⁶⁸ In essence, “the interplay between individual, institutional, and social narratives can set up a reinforcing, virtuous cycle, which ultimately creates a regional narrative that will further attract and shape certain types of institutions and individuals.”⁶⁹

By reading concretely in depth, the role of biblical narratives suggest that stories do not only form part of one’s cultural heritage, one may argue that cultures, indeed entire civilizations, live within the symbolic ‘world’ created by certain paradigmatic stories. Such stories construct, as it were, a habitable world, a frame of reference which enables people to orientate themselves and to cope with life and its many demands.⁷⁰ Overall, “groups cannot self-transcend, have a limited capacity to

⁶⁶ James Cochrane and Gerald O. West, "War, Remembrance and Reconstruction," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 84 (1993): 31.

⁶⁷Lauritzen, "Is 'Narrative' Really a Panacea?" 330.

⁶⁸ Hagel, "Making Detroit a Moment."

⁶⁹ Hagel, "Making Detroit a Moment."

⁷⁰Ernst M Conradie, "The Earth in God's Economy: Reflections on the Narrative of God's Work," *Scriptura* 97 (2008): 17.

self-examine their motives, and a great difficulty to sympathize with other groups or individuals who do not share their personal objectives or values.”⁷¹

Narrative of Social Change

Drawing on his own experience as a teenager in Germany during the Second World War, Metz identified with those scholars and holocaust survivors who focused their attention on God’s seeming indifference to suffering. He asserts that a Christian response to suffering ought to give holocaust victims the ultimate authority to remember and to speak about the religious interpretation of this catastrophe. Metz systematic critique of any theological apathy toward suffering contains an insistence that men and women have a duty to change history.⁷² The truth is “at the moment, we are locked into a narrative that we can’t seem to escape, a narrative of hopelessness and helplessness. Provoking the imagination is one way to step outside of that narrative.”⁷³ The present fact suggests the following:

We need new narratives that connect with people’s deepest motivations and promote more radical action. Stories engage people at every level – not just in their minds but in their emotions, values and imaginations, which are the drivers of real change. So if we want to transform society, we must learn to tell – and listen to – a new set of stories about the world we want to create.⁷⁴

Hence, “Metz’s main attention is focused on the appropriateness of talk of God, which can be thought of legitimately only in connection with talk and action of and with

⁷¹ Rohan Oberai and Cathleen Kaveny, "The Blood of the Martyrs are the Seeds of Change: How Self-Sacrifice Urges People to Implement Principles of Justice into Law," Unpublished Manuscripts, 2015, 8-9.

⁷² Dietrich, *The Holocaust, Genocide, and the Catholic Church*, 259.

⁷³ Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, “Harnessing the Power of Literature,” in *Conversations with inspirational African women Volume 1: Politics, the Arts and Feminist Spaces*, ed. Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah (Accra: African Women’s Development Fund, 2011), 85.

⁷⁴ Simon Hodges, “The Importance of Story Telling for Social Change,” accessed April 1, 2017, www.positive.news/2014/perspective/15464/whats-special-storytelling-social-change/.

human beings.”⁷⁵ Drawing from social learning and power dynamic is a narrative of social change, which has heavily impacted on the understanding of ethno religious crisis in Taraba. There is an Africa saying that resonates with this ‘you can know the strength of a man by what he does not by what he says.’ Therefore, the narratives of change are considered part and parcel of social innovations, defined as ‘change in social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and/or knowing’ in at least two ways.⁷⁶ At first, narratives of change convey alternative ways of doing, organizing, framing and/or knowing, and they promote social relations supporting these. Second, they not only convey but also constitute alternative ways of framing the world. It can be argued that ‘narratives of change,’ as (shared) ideas on how change can be brought about, make for a relevant and interesting object of enquiry en route to a better understanding of transformative change. There is another feature in the ethno religious challenge which narratives offer a respite despite the differences. This is in the area of narrative inquiry which “demonstrates that narrative inquiry is not only about studying one’s experience in the world; it is also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which those experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted.”⁷⁷ There are two recorded cases which play on the popular narratives of Christian farmers and Muslim pastoralist cattle breeder that need to change:

The seizure of farmland in June 1997 from the Tiv community of Mayo-Kam, Bali LGA, Taraba State. Two witness cases lend credence to this seizure. The

⁷⁵ Hille Haker, "Compassion as a Global Programme for Christianity," *Concilium* 4 (2001): 57.

⁷⁶ Julia M. Wittmayer, Julia Backhaus, Flor Avelino, Bonno Pel, Tim Strasser and Iris Kunze, "Narratives of Change: How Social Innovation Initiatives Engage with their Transformative Ambitions," *Transit Working Paper* 4 (2015): 1-2.

⁷⁷ Andrew J. Stremmel, "The Power of Narrative Inquiry to Transform both Teacher and Mentor," *Voices of Practitioners* 9, no. 1 (2014): 4.

report against Yakubu (Serkin 118 Dawa) of 18th July, 1997 by Mr. James Wakili Imetsugh and nine others. And the letter no. BLG/S40/vol. I of 21st July 1997 from the Chairman Bali LGA to Mr. Wakili James, Imetsugh. Again, violent attacks on the Zudai cattle rearers of Bali LGA of Taraba State in February 1999. Two letters support these attacks. A letter of Appeal of 3rd March 1999 to the Military Administrator of Taraba State by the Zudai village pastoralists signed on their behalf by Alhaji Manu Bature. The other letter is the one of 14th April, 1999 to the National Chairman, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association by Alhaji Manu Bature.⁷⁸

The commission report went on to reveal that in the guided view of the commission, while being true to its judgment concluded that:

...the reported cases of violations probably barely scratch the surface. There is a lack of vibrant civil society groups, which can monitor and document such violations; there is little if any media outlets for reporting and agitating against these violations; and victims hardly ever try to seek redress in courts.

Consequently, many cases just do not get recorded or reported.⁷⁹

As a result the sentiments are not expressed since justice is not redressed. Over a considerable period this anger and emotion explode into a difficult crisis, the kind that Taraba has come to be known for. Metz takes a further step to avoid or interrupt the totalization of history's meaning into one that is abstracted from the experiences of concrete persons with their unique histories. He stipulates a specific kind of narrative, emphasizing "dangerous stories," which compel us to remember past suffering,

⁷⁸ *Synoptic Overview of HRVIC Report: Conclusions and Recommendations* (Abuja: Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission, 2002), 117-118.

⁷⁹ *Synoptic Overview of HRVIC Report*, 120.

particularly the suffering of others.⁸⁰ Metz's refusal to find meaning in radical suffering, to excuse it, or to trivialize it with explanation, is essential in working against tendencies in Christian theology to encourage victims to passively accept or to spiritualize their suffering. He refuses to reduce human suffering to a theory or to try to fit it comfortably into a concept of God. His understanding of 'suffering unto God,' of the need to continue to cry out to God in the language of prayer about the suffering of the vulnerable, respects the negativity of the experience of suffering and refuses to let it be ignored.⁸¹ For Metz, God is always the God of slaves and not victors, burned into the community's collective memory via exodus and crucifixion, and demonstrable through the dangerous stories (lived and told) of biblical characters, martyrs, and today's oppressed.⁸²

Between 2013 and 2016 Mercy Corps investigated the causes and effects of the perennial clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria with interesting results. It noted: "We found that the average household affected by conflict today could see income increase by at least sixty four percent, and potentially 210 percent or higher, if conflicts were resolved."⁸³ This observation calls for change in the way these conflicts are viewed and received. Much of the changes though are within and local. They may also vary and are inadequate. This ideology for acceptability which is motivated by communal, biased, and governmental acts has to constantly undergo improvement in every age. This must happen through a persistent narrative of the

⁸⁰ Ashley, *Reading the Universe Story Theologically*, 875.

⁸¹ Johann M. Vento, "Violence, Trauma, and Resistance: A Feminist Appraisal of Metz's Mysticism of Suffering unto God," *Horizons* 29, no. 01 (2002): 11.

⁸² Joshua H. Lunde-Whitler, "Life-in-Community in Quest of Personhood: Exploring the Ethical Implication of Narrative in Christian Communities," Unpublished Manuscripts, 2014, 9.

⁸³ Samuel Ogundipe and Josiah Oluwole, "Nigeria Loses \$14 Billion Annually to Herdsmen-Farmers Clashes," *Premium Times*, April 15, 2016, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/201829-nigeria-loses-14-billion-annually-herdsmen-farmers-clashes-report.html>.

victims as sources of a fragile equation of authority, and fairness insides the contested arena. “Thus, the sacrifice by the martyr of charity is frequently, but not universally, a necessary, but not sufficient, source of social change and renewal toward greater equality and justice within the course of human history.”⁸⁴

The narrative of social change has a clear focus on survival and positive stories rather than a resigned social acceptance of death. In a sense, the narratives of social change result from a profound understanding of a sensitivity to an issue and a definitive role. In the making of a design, its conceptualization embraces the spiritual and social characters that a design essentially accommodates. A design, like the narrative of social change, is usually embodied in different media with elaborate expressions of designs that are associated with where they are meant to serve culturally.⁸⁵ Narrative of social change “makes this point elegantly by asking that our stories of social change become love stories. ...[the] argument is that undermining belief systems a necessary step in social change requires an emphasis on shared values and commonality. These shared values can then be used to show when, why, and how some people are not living up to them in practice.”⁸⁶ Recognizing that the general appearances of crises ridden cities and villages in Taraba have changed, social attitudes and value systems have deteriorated and narratives distorted.

Deconstructing the Narrative

A close examination of the popular narrative reveals gaps and exposes several questions about ethno religious relations that are unanswered. At the inception, it is significant to show as may have been pointed out, “constructed or not, ethnic and

⁸⁴ Oberai and Kaveny, “The Blood of the Martyrs are the Seeds of Change,” 4.

⁸⁵ Isah B. Kashim, Sunday R. Ogunduyile, and Oluwafemi S. Adelabu, "Culturally Inspired Design Education: A Nigerian Case Study," in *Industrial Design: New Frontiers*, ed. Denis A. Coelho (Croatia: Intech Open Access, 2011): 85.

⁸⁶ Hodges, *The Importance of Story Telling for Social Change*.

religious divides among neighbors can have deep histories.”⁸⁷ The traumatic experiences of victims and the unquantifiable economic cost of flexing ethno-religious muscle point to the fact that these imbroglios are harbingers of potential revolutionary pressures.⁸⁸ Ultimately, “these revolutionary pressures by their very nature elicit reactions from the disenchanting citizenry who feel marginalized and alienated. These revolutionary pressures are characteristic of ‘failed states’. The main features of failed states comprise their inability to meet the socio-economic needs of the citizenry amidst security challenges.”⁸⁹

The different narratives between pastoralists and agriculturalists interact in a conflictual manner, because they are a meta-conflict. A key function of each narrative, its function or intention, is to assign blame and responsibility. These are not just rival explanations which sit side by side, they actively attack the other explanations offered. In arguing that they have correctly analyzed the conflict, the different set of actors argue that rival explanations attempt to whitewash or cover up the real cause or else are superficial and self-serving.⁹⁰

It becomes necessary that these stories be properly deconstructed to arrive at the desired meaning proper to it. When considered in deconstructing the biblical texts about God’s violent intervention holds a lesson for us: Tendencies to reduce belief in God’s power over history to stories about a God that helps individuals must be reversed, thrown open and universalized into collective (concerning the people and all peoples, just like collective lamentation) and cosmic (concerning the whole world, as

⁸⁷ Aaron Sayne, *Rethinking Nigeria's Indigene-Settler Conflicts* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 2012), 6.

⁸⁸ K. E. Orji, "Revolutionary Pressures and Social Movements in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Experience," *African Research Review* 5, no. 4 (2011): 455.

⁸⁹ Orji, "Revolutionary Pressures and Social Movements in Nigeria," 455.

⁹⁰ Portia Roelofs, "Metaphors We Kill By," (M.Sc Thesis, University of London, 2012), 8.

did the Flood at Noah's time) dimensions. At the core of such lamentation lies, no doubt about God's ability to intervene because God does not exist or is too weak, but distress at divine failure to intervene even though God could.⁹¹ The Lord of history is not only capable of intervention, but does so continuously and powerfully in the form of people's insights, encounters and worship, in their actions and decisions, in the churches and the religions, and further than that, wherever God's justice and mercy and God's sustaining and liberating guidance in life are accepted and passed on.⁹²

The tension between the advocacy of both peace and violence remains, and requires the readers of the New Testament to recognize and to take the promotion of both peace and violence seriously, especially where these texts are used to promote a certain worldview, lifestyle and even particular actions:

Identifying common value is attractive, not just to those with whom we want to communicate directly, but also to other listeners who have to be part of the conversation. Focusing on commonality puts everyone in a stronger position to undermine belief systems and lay out new possibilities for social change.⁹³

Metz's question whether there can be a real theology after all the horrible experiences of the destruction of human life in Auschwitz, is also relevant for theology in Africa today.⁹⁴ Metz's intention is that questions on suffering and violence must become part of theology, even though the answers may not be fully

⁹¹ Ottmar Fuchs, "How to deal with Violence in Biblical Texts Some Considerations towards Biblical Hermeneutics of Violence," in *The Bible and Violence in Africa*, eds. Johannes Hunter and Joachim Kügler (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2016), 18.

⁹² Fuchs, *How to deal with Violence in Biblical Texts*, 18.

⁹³ Hodges, *The Importance of Story Telling for Social Change*.

⁹⁴ Theophilus Ugbedeajo Ejeh, "Compassion – A Uniting and Binding Ethos for Pluralistic Africa," *The Bible and Violence in Africa*, eds. Johannes Hunter and Joachim Kügler (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2016), 82.

given.⁹⁵ It is all about saying how God relates to the human person in one's experience of suffering and violence. For Metz, God does not overlook the suffering of the human person; instead, God partakes in peoples' suffering. For this reason Metz says that theology must not just be about the Easter-mystery but also about the paschal mystery; what he calls the "Mystery of Holy Saturday."⁹⁶ In Metz's view God identifies God self with every human person at all times. According to him, this idea of God should basically be seen as the unifying principle that brings peace among people of different cultures and religions. God is the God of all. And it is God's will to unite all people in love. This is a principle which can be universalized in the sense that all people should be made to realize that they have the duty to have compassion and love for their fellow human beings, taking the example from God.⁹⁷

Inter-ethnic violent clashes between the Kuteb group on one hand and the Chamba/Jukun group on the other hand came about as a result of the interplay of the foregoing factors. And unless these factors are thoroughly uprooted and completely destroyed, it is morning yet in the incidence of ethnic violence in our area. Unfortunately, uncles that are supposed to create secure environment for their nephews and nieces will not only continue to reject them and thus dismally fail in the discharge of their responsibilities to the children of Chamba/Jukun and Kuteb inter-ethnic marriages, but uncles on both sides will continue to kill their sister's children, thus destroying one of the most important and ancient institutions of African society.⁹⁸ The question remains, "what must I do for these people to rise again?" With great care, then, we might suggest that, somehow, both love and violence are rooted in God; that within the mess of history, he commits himself lovingly to someone or to

⁹⁵ Egeh, *Compassion: A Uniting and Binding Ethos*, 83.

⁹⁶ Egeh, *Compassion: A Uniting and Binding Ethos*, 83.

⁹⁷ Egeh, *Compassion: A Uniting and Binding Ethos*, 84.

⁹⁸ Ahmadu and Danfulani, *Struggle over Borders and Boundaries*, 298.

his people while at the same time inflicting injustice or violence to others. Ultimately, it is hoped, his love will bring about the kind of violence that will universally create a new world without suffering and death, where neither God nor humans desire to cause injustice and no longer have to. Before that, however, all evil and suffering must be crushed.⁹⁹

Shared Humanity: An Interruption

The interruption of theology about which Metz already wrote is one of the key pieces in dealing with narratives. It is interruption that opens room for the story of people. It is in this room that theology speaks. It is a quiet room where a story can and may be told without being countered or interrupted. It is exactly in one's story that theology will find traces and starting points to answer from the same narrativity and to offer a form of hope.¹⁰⁰ Hence, it can be established at the onset that "the whole metaphor and dynamic of the Christian narrative appears to be permeated with the interruption of its own narratives, its own identity, with the confrontation of the other, God."¹⁰¹ For Metz there can be no Christian faith without tension or turmoil, without danger or menace. After all, Christians are bearers of the subversive, dangerous memory of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is why they actively seek out the boundaries of life and co-existence, moved as they are by the human histories of suffering that compel them towards a preferential option for the poor, the suffering and the oppressed. By its very nature, the Christian faith disrupts

⁹⁹ Fuchs, *How to deal with Violence in Biblical Texts*, 17.

¹⁰⁰ Wim Smit, "Beyond mere Historical Remembrance: Commemoration, Intergenerational Consequences of War and Christian Hope in Times of Trauma," Lecture, Commemoration of the War Dead, Belgium, August, 2012, 6.

¹⁰¹ Lieven Boeve, "The Shortest Definition of Religion: Interruption (Part 3)," *The Pastoral Review* 5, no. 5 (2009): 18.

the histories of conqueror and vanquished and interrupts the ideologies of the powerful and the powerlessness of the victims.¹⁰²

In recent times, most Nigerian ethnic groups, both the majority and the minority groups, have expressed serious reservations about aspects of the Nigerian state. Many have demanded the de-concentration of the enormous fiscal and political powers concentrated at the centre. How can this objective be achieved without doing damage to the body politic? This is the real challenge facing both ethnic minorities and ethnic majorities in Nigeria. Unfortunately, these issues must be tackled against the background of heightened ethnic and religious tensions in the country, and without the benefit of significant consensus.¹⁰³ At the depth of the matter is a deeper understanding of humanity: human relations and encounters. To the African, in more specific African terms, humanity is not just an anthropological term; it is also a moral term when it comes to considering the relations between members of the human species.¹⁰⁴ Principally, “human beings become agents [of dialogue] through others.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the ‘extended family of God’ in Taraba which is submerged in constant ethno religious crisis must be understood from the African concepts of family which encounters an interruption. Conversely, crisis may offer opportunities for new understandings of dialogue. Metz would therefore adopt the category of interruption here, as not merely a cultural, but theological category suggestive of working toward reconciling antagonizing forces of community living.¹⁰⁶ It is taken for granted that

¹⁰² Boeve, *The Shortest Definition of Religion*, 20.

¹⁰³ Emmanuel M Ome, "Minorities and National Unity in Nigeria," *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences (IJRASS)* 6 (2013):128.

¹⁰⁴ Kwame Gyekye, "African Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2011 edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/african-ethics/>.

¹⁰⁵ Ignasio Malizani Jimu, "Shared sociability and humanity," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 9, no. 4 (2016): 410.

¹⁰⁶ Boeve, *The Shortest Definition of Religion*, 20.

the people of Taraba as Africans may have their alternative way of looking at the world, an alternative cosmology, which can better serve their needs for cultural development and social justice in an ecologically responsible context. This alternative way may be called a life centered way, since it stresses the bondedness, the interconnectedness, of all living beings.¹⁰⁷

In the context of this shared humanity, the Christian relationship to people of other faiths takes the form of *kenosis*. The model sees radical self-emptying as a necessity to establishing meaningful relationships with people of other faiths and other cultures. It is only in true and radical openness to the other in the totality of his/her being and openness to his/her deepest motivations in life, that the witness of God's love for all people can be shared. Inculturation and interreligious dialogue therefore are not just optional for the interested few, but, according to the model of *kenosis*, they belong to the core of the Christian calling to imitate Christ in his self-emptying love for people. They are authentic expressions of the Christian identity. Understanding the culture, the religion, the socio-political framework of the other is crucial in the understanding of the other as a person and a prerequisite of sharing his/her life with him/her.¹⁰⁸

People understand themselves and gain identity only in a framework of life. They are defined as they engage in work, ritual practice, and symbolic activities. They must understand themselves as belonging to nature, as living the life of nature. It is through their relationships with nature that people discover their identities and approach the possibility of living life fully. As nature opens itself up to people, it

¹⁰⁷Harvey Sindima, "Community of Life: Ecological Theology in African Perspective," *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches in Ecological Theology*, eds. Charles Birch, William Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1990), 137.

¹⁰⁸Martha Th. Frederiks, "Kenosis as a Model for Interreligious Dialogue," *Missiology* 33, no. 2 (2005): 222.

presents the possibilities for experiencing the fullness of life, possibilities for discovering how inseparably bonded people are to each other and to all creation.¹⁰⁹ Thus, even though the African people traditionally live in small communities and are divided into different ethnic or cultural groups and into clans and lineages with complex networks of relationships, nevertheless, they perceive humanity to embrace all other peoples beyond their narrow geographic or spatial confines, to constitute all human beings into one universal family of humankind. Even though this family is fragmented into a multiplicity of peoples and cultures, nevertheless, it is a shared family (a shared humanity) the relationships among whose members ought to feature a certain kind of morality: the morality of a shared humanity.¹¹⁰

A society is a group of people involved with each other through persistent relations, or a large social grouping sharing the same geographical or social territory, subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. Human societies are characterized by patterns of relationships (social relations) between individuals who share a distinctive culture and institutions; a given society may be described as the sum total of such relationships among its constituent members. In the social sciences, a larger society often evinces stratification and/or dominance patterns in subgroups.¹¹¹ Thus, the virtue of “humanity” is achieved by the strengths of kindness on the one hand versus love on the other. The virtue of temperance similarly has several routes: humility, prudence, and self-control. The practical implication of

¹⁰⁹ Sindima, *Community of Life*, 144-145.

¹¹⁰ Gyekye, *African Ethics*,

¹¹¹ Theophilus Tyavwase Aver and Wanger Justin Orban, "Judiciary and Democracy, Issues in Contemporary Nigerian Society," *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 88.

this classification is that it suggests which character strengths are similar and which are not.¹¹²

In this chapter, the impact of narratives has been identified as critical and essential to issues of ethno religious violence in Taraba. Ethno-religious violence and relations were interrogated in five critical parts: narrative of suffering, power and social change, which helps to deconstruct the narrative that leads to a shared humanity. The chapter uncovered the gaps inherent in the narratives and put forward a critical dialogue of the nature of human relations with its inherent theological posturing to arrive at a platform for dialogue. This platform has lead to an undertaking that requires a renewed meaning of the shared humanity which is the ultimate recipe to transform Taraba from the ashes of ethno religious tensions and crisis into a loving community of people

¹¹² Katherine Dahlsgaard, Christopher Peterson and Martin E.P. Seligman, "Shared Virtue: The Convergence of Valued Human Strengths across Culture and History," *Review of General Psychology* 9, no. 3 (2005): 211.

Chapter Six: Solidarity in a Contested Community

Introduction

Chapter 6 examines the African understanding of community, which itself builds on narratives and relationships. Ultimately, the understanding of community also shapes everyday ecclesiology. It correlates with stories of God's people building up the church. Scripture and tradition, the Acts of the Apostles and ecclesiology, reveal such a connectedness. Throughout this chapter, as with the two preceding ones, magisterial teaching on social justice and interreligious dialogue will be presented as a critical resource for the Catholic Church in Nigeria, particularly Taraba as it faces situations of social violence. The essential nature of every man and woman dictates that every person is drawn into community, in harmony with each other, by the force and power of love. Thus, the companionship of all people is a fundamental requirement of humanity's social existence in its essential structure.¹ This chapter draws on three key components: companionship, connections, and compassion. It interrogates ethno-religious violence in a contested community like Taraba. It unpacks the issue while calling for bold imagination and vision of social acceptance and collaboration for peace in the state.

Social Companionship

People are social beings.² It is advisable to desist from adopting stereotypes that insist on accounting for what people are. Such stereotypes are usually not clear to users and many times are not properly directed to the issue. Instead, the overall focus

¹ Rohan Oberai, and Cathleen Kaveny, "The Blood of the Martyrs are the Seeds of Change: How Self-Sacrifice Urges People to Implement Principles of Justice Into Law," Unpublished Manuscripts, 2015, 13.

² Gina Stepp, "People: Who needs them?" Fall 2011, <http://www.vision.org/visionmedia/social-relationships-introvert-vs-extrovert/50363.aspx>.

should be primarily targeted at the concern for a shared and collective desire to bond.³ Developing the idea of social companionship at the intersection of ethno-religious violence, solidarity, and community, offers insights. Metz uses “solidarity” to describe a universal hope that “guarantees the stability of those standards with which men and women, faced with the accumulated suffering of the just, stand up again and again against the prevailing unjust conditions.”⁴ This understanding reflects an idealized representation of community and solidarity.

As sociologists and anthropologists argue, “people do not exist except within a social context,”⁵ and social reality is based on a number of consistent rules and principles that constrain an individual's pursuit of personal goals and outcomes.⁶ Yet social integration varies across societies. For example people may live in limited kinship units consisting of ‘immediate family’ such as husband, wife, and children.”⁷ In other cultures, the ‘immediate family’ includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, or even close friends. These relationships can be determined by bloodlines or kinship ties based on loose and distant relations.⁸

The fact of long time cohabitation, of distinct peoples living together in a particular environment for a long period of time, itself provides ground for solidarity. This is not always the case. For example, in the Wukari Local Government Area in

³ Stepp, *People: Who Need Them?*

⁴ Joshua H. Lunde-Whitler, "Life-in-Community in Quest of Personhood: Exploring the Ethical Implication of Narrative in Christian Communities," Unpublished Manuscripts, Boston College, 2014, 13.

⁵ Christopher P. Earley and Cristina B. Gibson, "Taking Stock in Our Progress on Individualism-Collectivism: 100 Years of Solidarity and Community," *Journal of Management* 24, no. 3 (1998): 265.

⁶ Earley and Gibson, *Taking Stock in Our Progress on Individualism-Collectivism*, 266.

⁷ Earley and Gibson, *Taking Stock in Our Progress on Individualism-Collectivism*, 266.

⁸ Earley and Gibson, *Taking Stock in Our Progress on Individualism-Collectivism*, 266.

Taraba may be as a unifying factor rather than a source of conflicts. However, events suggest that this is not the case. History shows that people have been cohabiting together for a long time but yet integrating relations have been full of ethnic violence and tensions. The Hausa population has inhabited Wukari for decades and some have attained important positions giving them claims to indigeneship of the land, an avenue to propagate their religion, win more converts, and in general making it more difficult for anyone to expel them from the land.⁹ Not surprisingly, this raises deeply the conflict that has been manifested in ethnic fashion and been going on in Taraba for years.

Inter-ethnic conflicts between these groups often entails violence that surpasses that found in most of Christian versus Muslim conflicts in Nigeria. For example, during the peak of the long-term conflicts between the minorities Kuteb, Jukun, and Chamba ethnic groups in the early nineties (April 25-26, 1993), eight villages were completely destroyed, over 100 people killed, hundreds wounded, and thousands rendered refugees. Issues in contention include control of local government councils, chieftaincy institutions, land, markets, collection of taxes, and the decisions taken regarding sites for federal and state government projects.¹⁰ This level of contestation noticed in Taraba does not bode well for the future of the state and its people's relations with one another. The sense of companionship, central to inter-community relationships, has been eroded on critical fronts. Division and distrust is almost all that remains. While the three categories of memory, narratives and solidarity are critical for Metz, the term "interruption" is also a key element. He uses

⁹ Dada Adebunola Olurunfemi and Victor Lukputa, "History as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution: A Study of the Ethno-Religious Crisis in Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria," in *Global Issues on Rural and Urban Conflict Violence in the 21st Century*, eds. Dada Adebunola Olurunfemi et al. (Akure: Science and Development Institute, 2014), 9-10.

¹⁰ Rene Sanchez, "Agapic Solidarity: Practicing the Love Command in a Globalized Reality" (PhD diss., Boston College, Chestnut Hill, 2013), 112.

it as a heuristic device to illuminate the manner in which theology and religion should be held within public and political discourse.¹¹ This understanding of theology or religion as interruptive has implications that reach into all areas of human existence. Metz notes that this demands the creation of an alternative view of history and subjectivity that challenges all dominant discourses. Practicing this alternative requires an ongoing metanoia for people and the society in which they live.¹²

Solidarity helps interpret and drive community discourse. Specific aspects of its notion, use, and appeal can help understand its place in the interruption process of ethno-religious violence in Taraba. When used in general terms, solidarity refers to particular types of social relations between individuals as well as groups. As such, solidarity refers to a vast range of social phenomena from social cohesion to social movements, political to civic organizations, from religious duties to racial obligations.¹³ Solidarity requires engagement with historical struggles for justice as an extension of the love command. Solidarity resists the tendency to privatize Gospel demands and prevent turning the gospel into purely interior experience. It moves away from understanding human experience only through the lens of exchange and barter and requires a 'commitment, without counting the cost, to shattered lives.'¹⁴ Solidarity is based not only on the memory of the dead and those who have been overcome, it is a solidarity with those who have died based on the dangerous memory not only of the successful, but also the defeated, not only the victorious, but also the lost.¹⁵ A good

¹¹ Jason Stevens, "Political Theology: Is Sovereignty Necessary Theological?" *The Immanent Frame*, August 16, 2016, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/08/16/is-sovereignty-necessarily-theological/>.

¹² Sanchez, *Agapic Solidarity*, 113.

¹³ Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández, "Decolonization and the Pedagogy of Solidarity," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 46.

¹⁴ Sanchez, *Agapic Solidarity*, 112.

¹⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1981), 229.

example is the ethno religious violence in Takum, a Local Government Area in Taraba. Takum has been destroyed and its houses laid in ruin since 2000. Displaced people have moved to other cities or established new settlements. One such camp is near the army barracks, where they hope to find security. People have lost their livelihoods and are not able to engage in normal economic activities. This has resulted in major economic setbacks for individuals and the community at large.¹⁶

Getting such a community back to its proper standing takes considerable work. Solidarity “gives emphasis to the specific character of human destiny and the human reserves of Christianity and theology and is able to join, with that specific character, in discussion about human history and society.”¹⁷ Christian solidarity in memory with the dead is not determined by an abstract interest, nor is it primarily motivated by care or anxiety of the kind that provokes the question: what will happen to me in death? On the contrary, its guiding question is: what happens to others, especially those who suffer?¹⁸ Christianity is therefore not able to remain neutral in the struggle for worldwide solidarity for the sake of the needy and the underprivileged. It is compelled, to do so, proclaiming that all people should become subjects in solidarity in the presence of God. It refused to regard the already existing subjects in society simply as the only valid religious subject to take part in that struggle.¹⁹

Solidarity is about human beings. It is related to one of two competing visions of liberty, and, ultimately, two competing accounts of what it means to be a human being. The dominant account, the one most people use to explain the significance of

¹⁶ Bala Musa, “Role of Traditional and New Media in Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria’s Middle Belt Region: A Primer on Peace Building and Community Development,” in *Impact of Communication and the Media on Ethnic Conflict*, eds. Steven Gibson and Agnes Lucy Lando (Hershey PA: IGI Global, 2016), 33.

¹⁷ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 229.

¹⁸ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 232.

¹⁹ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 235.

their lives to themselves, instrumentalizes social ties and portrays individuals as sovereign, self-defining, autoteleological selves. The alternative to this strongly individualistic and atomistic account emphasizes human embeddedness in and dependence upon social and cultural ties. In the latter perspective, community mediates individuals as they are related to others and the world, and sets conditions for authentic self-rule. In this sense, community has a normative function and represents the achievement of shared understandings, meanings, and values. In contrast to the dominant account that understands liberty in terms of an “unencumbered self,” the latter perspective sees true liberty and self-sufficiency as realized only through relationship with others. Such bonds themselves set the conditions for human freedom. Liberty does not represent an individual accomplishment but a state of being only cooperatively achieved and maintained. The notion of solidarity traces the fault lines that run through the foundations of society and of modernity itself.²⁰

Solidarity represents a reaction to the sort of extreme and doctrinaire individualism that characterizes so much of Enlightenment political thought and the law it called forth. The word first appeared in the late 1700’s, in the wake of the French Revolution, and its use spread with the disruptions that accompanied the political, economic, and social ‘triple revolution’ that transformed the patterns of life across the Western world during the Nineteenth Century.²¹ This description is gradually moving to countries in the developing world like Nigeria.

There has been a diminishing of community-based solidarity, shared values, and, thus, social cement. Everywhere in the developed world, the stable, geo-local and

²⁰ Thomas C. Kohler, "The Notion of Solidarity and the Secret History of American Labor Law," *Buffalo Law Review* 53, (2006): 883-884.

²¹ Kohler, “The Notion of Solidarity and the Secret History of American Labor Law,” 883-884.

face-to-face community is disintegrating for well-known reasons: independence, opportunity, opulence, and prosperity.²² In essence “solidarity arises from those actions of reciprocal protection, care, and trust of one human being towards another and vice versa because these seek to preserve the worth that the pair generates relationally.”²³ Solidarity is the virtue of commitment to the common good in the midst of severe temptation to neglect it and benefit oneself. It leads to commitment to a larger common good than the nation and even community with those not part of one's political system.²⁴

The ideal of solidarity can be very appealing. It has a special place in the human heart as evidenced in the teaching and communitarian character developed and consummated in the work of Jesus Christ. For the very Word made flesh willed to share in the human fellowship. He was present at the wedding of Cana, visited the house of Zacchaeus, and ate with publicans and sinners. He revealed the love of the Father and the sublime vocation of humanity in terms of the most common of social realities and by making use of the speech and the imagery of plain everyday life. Willingly obeying the laws of his country he sanctified those human ties, especially family ones, which are the source of social structures. He chose to lead the life proper to an artisan of his time and place. In his preaching he clearly taught the children of God to treat one another as brothers and sisters. In his prayers he pleaded that all his disciples might be ‘one.’ Indeed as the redeemer of all, he offered himself for all even to point of death. “Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his

²² Margaret S Archer, "The Current Crisis: Consequences of Neglecting the Four Key Principles of Catholic Social Doctrine," a Paper Presented at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Rome, May 2010, *Acta* 16 (2011): 132, www.pass.va/content/dam/scienze-sociali/pdf/acta16/acta16-archer.pdf.

²³ Archer, *The Current Crisis*, 136.

²⁴ Clarke E. Cochran, "Sacrament and Solidarity: Catholic Social Thought and Health Care Policy Reform," *Journal of Church & Society* 41 (1999): 496.

friends” (John 15:13). He commanded his Apostles to preach to all peoples the Gospel's message that the human race was to become the family of God, in which the fullness of the law would be love.²⁵

It bears mentioning that solidarity is sustained through institutions which serve as centers of information, communication, and commonality among peoples divided by vast distances and social difference but united in their commitment to human dignity, liberty, and equality.²⁶ The notion of peoples’ rights or solidarity rights is the core of the philosophy of African humanism, something ascertainable among most pre-colonial African societies as a philosophy of compassion, community, and solidarity.²⁷ A human being is called to this world by birth to a natural solidarity. A human person is not an island. In *Ecclesia in Africa* John Paul II talks about “natural solidarity” as a common human reality. Natural solidarity includes natural institutions like the biological family, clan, tribe and other such groups.²⁸ Solidarity is manifested in the first place by the distribution of goods and remuneration for work. It also presupposes the effort for a more just social order where tensions are better able to be reduced and conflicts more readily settled by negotiation.²⁹

There is no relationship with God that is not also a relationship with other believers. In recent times, this connection has been expressed in the concept of solidarity. Solidarity is more than the natural law principle that the human person is a social and political animal. It is also that the human person is called to a relationship of trust, commitment, and sacrifice that bursts the boundaries of the political. There is

²⁵ Paul VI, *Gaudium est spes*, sec. 32.

²⁶ Benjamin Elias Winks, "A Covenant of Compassion: African Humanism and the rights of Solidarity in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 11, no. 2 (2011): 450.

²⁷ Winks, "A Covenant of Compassion," 456.

²⁸ Jordan Nyenyembe, "Solidarity in Ecclesia in Africa: Where Are We Now?" *Hekima Review* 52 (2015): 9.

²⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition, 1940.

a common good beyond the common good of the political community itself.³⁰ As magisterial teachings establish,³¹ and as Paul VI points out, “the reality of human solidarity, which is a benefit for us, also imposes a duty.”³² This is what it means to work for the common good, “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”³³ Solidarity, as defined by Pope John Paul II, represents “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say for the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”³⁴

Solidarity is a recurring theme in the writings of John Paul II. In another encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, he asserts that the term describes “one of the fundamental principles of the Christian view of social and political organization,”³⁵ and notes that previous popes have identified the same principle under the name “friendship,”³⁶ “social charity,”³⁷ and “the civilization of love.”³⁸ John Paul II’s repeated appeal to this principle in a variety of contexts makes it clear that solidarity can be neither a vague feeling of compassion or commiseration nor the union of one group in society over against another. Though the pope uses the word to describe the union of workers against the degradation of their work, he insists that solidarity “aims

³⁰ Cochran, *Sacrament and Solidarity*, 492-493.

³¹ See, Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Pius XI *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), John XIII (1961), *Mater et Magistra*, (1963) *Pacem in Terris*, Vatican II (1965) *Gaudium et Spes*, Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965), *Populorum Progressio* (1967), John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Centesimus Annus* (1991) Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, sec. 2 (2009), John Paul II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, sec. 39; Francis, *Laudato Si*, sec. 159 (2015). Kaulemu, David, “Development Aid, Solidarity and the Common Good,” *Moyo 500* (2009): 3.

³² Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, sec. 11

³³ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 903.

³⁴ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, sec. 38.

³⁵ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 3.

³⁶ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, sec. 21.

³⁷ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, sec. 88.

³⁸ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, sec. 3

at the good of social justice,"³⁹ and is not undertaken "for the sake of 'struggle' or in order to eliminate the opponent."⁴⁰ It is a human and Christian virtue, describing the commitment to the common good. It has three principal manifestations, according to whether the common good is taken to refer to goods, activities, or the communion of persons.⁴¹ This same division is found in the treatment of solidarity in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.⁴²

Finally, this category of solidarity has an inherent trans-temporal quality, as seen in the work of Metz. It allows people to speak of being in solidarity with all those marginalized subjects in the contemporary world and to extend this deep compassion for those who have been silenced within the larger historical narrative. This disallows a purely 'materialist' reading of historical suffering by giving a certain gravitas to the suffering experienced by subjects who cannot impact social political conditions and are often ever excluded from a sense of social connectedness.⁴³

Social Connectedness

Understanding the community entails understanding it in a number of ways. Whether or not the community is defined geographically, it still has a geographic context. Knowing this setting is key to a full understanding of it. At the same time, it is important to understand the specific community. This means having knowledge of its people, culture, concerns, and relationships. This entails developing and monitoring affiliation and connection with the people.⁴⁴ Perhaps,

³⁹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, sec. 8.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, sec. 20.

⁴¹ R. Hittinger, "Solidarity," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 13, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 301.

⁴² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition, 1940–1942.

⁴³ Sanchez, *Agapic Solidarity*, 112.

⁴⁴ "Community Tool Box" accessed April 30, 2017, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/describe-the-community/main>.

...community in its most generic significance pertains to the personal relationship experienced among individuals that is essential to the constitution of human society. Thus all of human activities insofar as they affect two or more individuals exhibit various dimensions of community; the more such activities affect the personhood of the individuals, the more intense and demanding is the sense of community. All religious traditions are, therefore, characterized by a concern with community, at least as the natural situation of society. There is also a tendency in the social organization of religion to develop specifically religious forms of community.⁴⁵

At the base of all knowledge and understanding retrieved from community, an important component is its social connections. Social connectedness is the genesis, development, and realization that social life provides the key to understanding the relationship that ties knowledge to persons, communities, and life worlds. It is through representation that one can understand both the diversity and the expressiveness of all social connections. Despite issues raised about community, seeing oneself as part of a local community has a powerful influence on people.⁴⁶ Classical theorists wrestle with the notion of community, particularly the forces that hold together complex societies. For Wolf,⁴⁷ the community or society is the arena within which classes, defined by their relationship to the means of production, exist. History is tantamount to the struggle for power among these classes. Sound relations

⁴⁵ R. E. Whitson, "Community," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 38.

⁴⁶ Leo R. Chavez, "The power of the imagined community: The settlement of undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans in the United States," *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 1 (1994): 53.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Wolff, "Karl Marx," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2017 edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/marx/>.

are in a constant state of tension as a result.⁴⁸ Durkheim,⁴⁹ on the other hand, argues that complex societies develop solidarity precisely because of the division of labor within their social and economic systems. The mutual interdependence of individuals means they have to rely on the skills and abilities of others in the society, which increases social solidarity and cohesion.⁵⁰ To this Weber adds that expanding bureaucratic power decreases individual and communal autonomy.⁵¹ Community itself refers simply to ‘a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together,’ which Brow⁵² argues combines both a feeling of solidarity and an understanding of shared identity.⁵³ As people become more transient today, the notion of community itself is changing:

A migrant is not limited to membership in one community; sentiments and connections for one community do not categorically restrict feelings of membership in another. The desire for discrete categories of community membership is a product of academic needs, I suspect, rather than the ambiguous, changing, and pragmatic perceptions of migrants themselves.⁵⁴

Such an open and fluid depiction by the one in search of community should lead one to understanding community as solidarity (shared identity and norms) which serves to define the concept in a distinctive and intrinsic manner, making it possible to distinguish a community from all other types of social relations. One can say that any

⁴⁸ Wolff, *Karl Marx*.

⁴⁹ Paul Carls, “Émile Durkheim (1858—1917),” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed May 17, 2017, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>.

⁵⁰ Carls, *Émile Durkheim (1858—1917)*.

⁵¹ Gertrud Neuwirth, “A Weberian Outline of a Theory of Community: Its Application to the 'Dark Ghetto,’” *The British Journal of Sociology* 20, no. 2 (1969): 148.

⁵² Brow, James, “Notes on Community, Hegemony, and the Uses of the Past,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 63, (1990): 1.

⁵³ Chavez, *The Power of the Imagined Community*, 53.

⁵⁴ Chavez, *The Power of the Imagined Community*, 55.

social configuration that possesses shared identity and norms is a community. The term is thus freed of the incidental baggage of territoriality, ethnicity, or level of industrialization of the economy.⁵⁵

Below is a case that is frequent in Taraba. Such a case makes it hard to imagine how community and solidarity will stay connected and impact the lives of the people. Recently,

...the casualty figure in the ethno-religious crisis in Wukari and Ibi local government areas of Taraba State has risen to forty four. More people were killed in retaliatory attacks on the roads and in remote hamlets. Eye-witnesses said some of the bodies had their heads cut off. More houses were also discovered to have been torched in the resurgence of violence which erupted on Sunday. Tension has grown high in other areas, including Takum and Donga local government councils.⁵⁶

When this occurs and it does frequently in Taraba, it tarnishes in more than one way the essence of African cultural existence. African communalism is ‘a concept that views humanity in terms of collective existence and inter-subjectivity, serving as the basis for supportiveness, cooperation, collaboration and solidarity.’ It is fundamentally a kinship-oriented social order, informed by an ethic of reciprocity. In a communal social order, one is brought up with a sense of solidarity with large groups of people. This process is called ‘cohabitation.’

During the course of this “cohabitation,” one comes to see one’s interests as being bound up with the interests of the group over a great number of issues of life and well-being. This sense of community is a characteristic of African life. To many

⁵⁵ Jnanabrata Bhattacharyya, "Theorizing Community Development," *Community Development* 34, no. 2 (2004): 12.

⁵⁶ Fanen Ihyongo, “Death Toll in Taraba Violence Hits 44,” *The Nation*, June 17, 2014, <http://thenationonlineng.net/death-toll-taraba-violence-hits-44/>.

Africans, this communal efficacy defines being an African. This form of communalism signifies the human person as an inherently communal being embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, and never as an isolated, atomistic individual. In African communities, people view themselves and what they do as equally good to others as to themselves.⁵⁷

Developing Rahner's theology, and building from its limitations, Metz and later liberation theologians include the cultural context as a primary source for theology. They employ socioeconomic and political analyses. However, some liberation theologians preclude other options resulting in a less well-rounded analysis of religious experience.⁵⁸ A more fully embedded psycho-cultural perspective responds to this limitation, and emphasizes personal ties and community solidarity. Such personal ties and solidarity are critical to the formation and maintenance of community.⁵⁹ Indeed, "ethnic cohesion, solidarity, and trust have a number of benefits for communities and individuals."⁶⁰ However, "as a means of interpretation, trust is a problematic and disputed territory that is grounded in a range of culturally and historically specific assumptions regarding human association and organization."⁶¹ In a way, "confrontation and conflict play important roles in helping community members protect themselves from identity shape shifters as conflict can

⁵⁷ Gladys Ndoda, "Ubuntu and Client Service Charter Nexus," *Global Journal of Management and Business Research* 14, no. 2 (2014): 36.

⁵⁸ J. J. Mueller, "Appreciative Awareness: The Feeling-Dimension in Religious Experience," *Theological Studies* 45, no. 1 (1984): 58-59.

⁵⁹ Yueh-Huang Huang and William P. Stewart, "Rural Tourism Development: Shifting basis of Community Solidarity," *Journal of Travel Research* 34, no. 4 (1996): 26.

⁶⁰ Alejandro Portes, "Downsides of Social Capital," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 52 (2014): 18408.

⁶¹ John Campbell, Gordon Fletcher and Anita Greenhill, "Conflict and Identity Shape Shifting in an Online Financial Community," *Information Systems Journal* 19, no. 5 (2009): 462.

facilitate the conditions necessary for the unmasking of perpetrators.”⁶² The cause of close personal ties and solidarity has been a primary issue in research associated with the psycho cultural-approach. One viewpoint suggests that close personal ties are the product of a shared culture and lifestyle.

Following this psycho-cultural approach, McMillan and Chavis⁶³ suggest that the primary function of a community is to satisfy its members’ needs, a process they refer to as ‘reinforcement.’ When residents have a similar cultural background, they tend to identify with and help each other achieve their common goals. Their bonding is cohesive due to the integrative forces of sharing the same cultural background. Reinforcement provides incentives for residents to bond with one another and maintain solidarity as a ‘positive sense of togetherness.’ In addition to reinforcement, communities develop social norms to control members. In this sense, the community functions both to satisfy members’ needs and to influence members’ behavior. Thus, theorists examine not only the influence of the community on the individual, but also the sentiment of the individual toward the community. Influence is bidirectional and mutually reinforcing. The community can influence its members, thus strengthening interpersonal bonds and solidarity. Likewise, residents believe they have an influence on the community, something that further enhances their sense of solidarity.

Besides the ‘shared culture’ viewpoint, another approach to understanding solidarity is examining how feelings of belonging and self-identity with others promote community. Self-identification as a member of a community provides a sense of security. Poplin suggests that ‘whatever psychological security and stability

⁶² Campell, Fletcher and Greenhill, *Conflict and Identity Shape*, 468.

⁶³ David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory," *Journal of Community Psychology* 14, no. 1 (1986): 12.

individuals enjoy come to them by virtue of their community membership.’⁶⁴ For residents, membership provides them emotional safety and reinforces a sense of belonging. Individuals use their community membership to protect themselves from threat. Their tools are mostly language, dress, and ritual, which function to separate ‘we’ from ‘they.’ To have and enjoy membership, people must invest. Personal investment or involvement is a key element. The degree of members’ involvement determines the strength of personal ties. The more people invest in their community, the more they share with one another. The more emotionally committed they become, the stronger their identification and attachment to the community.⁶⁵

Aspects of this involvement stem from notions of the human person that originate from the Judeo-Christian tradition and scriptures.

The biblical tradition relates the originality of human personality to the originality of divine personality. The human person is 'like no other' because each person is 'made in the image of God' (Gen.1:27). Human originality is found in divine resemblance. A human being is holy and like no other because humans are in the image of God who is holy and like no other.⁶⁶

This understanding includes an emphasis on mutuality, on feelings shared and common to all without excluding groups or sections of society. Human beings are made for each other, to complement one another, in complete solidarity. Thus, there ought to be a harmony of interests and responsibilities among people, ideally leading to consensus and collective action for something. This also includes subsidiarity, assigning decision making power to smaller units. The goal of subsidiarity is to seek

⁶⁴ David E. Poplin, *Communities: A Survey of Theories and Methods of Research* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 19.

⁶⁵ Huang and Stewart, “Rural Tourism Development,” 26-27.

⁶⁶ Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: On earth as it is in Heaven* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 110-111.

ultimate good in each other. Africans are conscious that they are meant for each other, and the African psychocultural world revolves around this theme. Hence the *Ubuntu* phrase (“I am because you are”)⁶⁷ made popular by Desmond Tutu, reveals that a person with Ubuntu understanding is open and available to others, affirming others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.⁶⁸

Additionally, "Africans are notoriously religious, and each people's society in Africa has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the departments of life so it is not easy or possible to isolate it from other aspects of African society and culture."⁶⁹ A study of these religious systems is therefore a study of the peoples themselves in all the complexities of traditional and modern life.⁷⁰ There are two ways in which morality in Africa, is distinct from European approaches to morality. First, African morality is essentially relational in the sense that the only way to develop one's humanness is to relate to others in a positive way. In other words, one becomes a person solely through other persons.

⁶⁷ Ubuntu is defined as the essence of being fully human, that is, African humanism, a philosophy, an ethic and as a worldview. Ubuntu is a beautiful [and old] concept. At its most basic, Ubuntu can be translated as “human kindness,” but its meaning is much bigger in scope than that it embodies the ideas of connection, community, and mutual caring for all. Ubuntu is a concept that is derived from proverbial expressions (aphorisms) found in several languages in Africa South of the Sahara. However, it is not only a linguistic concept but a normative connotation embodying how we ought to relate to the other – what our moral obligation is towards the other (both human and non-human). Ubuntu comprises one of the core elements of a human being. See, Lesley Le Grange, "Ubuntu/Botho as Ecophilosophy and Ecosophy," *Journal of Human Ecology* 49, no. 3 (2015): 304.

⁶⁸ David Suze Manda, “Ubuntu Philosophy as an African Philosophy for Peace,” *Africafiles*, March 14, 2009, accessed April 30, 2021, www.africafile.org.

⁶⁹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1969), 1.

⁷⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1.

That is, one cannot realize one's true self in opposition to others or even in isolation from them. They point out that ubuntu means that peoples' deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human, and to achieve this requires one to enter more deeply into community with others. One therefore cannot become more fully human or realize one's true self by exploiting, deceiving, or acting in unjust ways towards others. The second way in which African morality differs from an Aristotelian or other Western moral philosophy is that it defines positive relationship with others in strictly communal terms.⁷¹

Flowing from the above, Metz sees possibilities for prophetic contributions to the global ecclesial communality. The first is a solidaristic subjectivity not characterized by bourgeois individualism but yet not merely pre-bourgeois. This suggests new connections between redemption and liberation, grace and freedom, and even mystical experience and politics. Basic Christian communities that result in this context cannot be merely copied exclusively, but can be an inspiration for the church everywhere.⁷² Without an adequate vision of human life, it is easy to lose sight of human interconnectedness and thus become vulnerable to an inner slavery that not only ignores human need but even rewards human greed.⁷³ Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* notes that the problems of the modern world are also related to disorders of the human heart:

The truth is that the imbalances under which the modern world labors are linked with that more basic imbalance which is rooted in the heart of human beings... [where] many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one

⁷¹ Le Grange, *Ubuntu/Botho as Ecophilosophy and Ecosophy*, 304-305.

⁷² Rudolf J. Siebert, "The Church of the Future - The Church from Below: Kung and Metz," *Cross Currents* 31, no. 1 (1981): 80.

⁷³ Daniel G. Groody, "Globalizing Solidarity: Christian Anthropology and the Challenge of Human Liberation," *Theological Studies* 69, no. 2 (2008): 261.

hand, as created beings they experience their limitations in a multitude of ways; on the other hand, they feel themselves to be boundless in their desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions they are constantly forced to choose among them and renounce some. Indeed, as weak and sinful beings, they often do what they would not, and fail to do what they would. Hence they suffer from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society.⁷⁴

Human interconnectedness means that people come to understand what it means to be human only within the context of their relationships, which must be grounded in the dignity given by God to humans and all other creatures. The source and grounding of all relationships is God and God's very compassion.⁷⁵

Social Compassion

Social compassion shifts the context from companion and connectedness to compassion. This is key and appropriate for interrogating ethno-religious violence in Taraba. Social compassion remains the radical notion that has supported the greatest social changes in contemporary times.⁷⁶ For Metz, compassion is closely related to the concept of suffering and more particularly violence.⁷⁷ As a result, social compassion incorporates resources from different sources, notably political, economic, and historical, as well as the theological sciences, most notably the scriptures and spirituality. Compassion is a global program for Christianity. Metz understands

⁷⁴Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, sec. 10.

⁷⁵ Groody, *Globalizing Solidarity*, 266.

⁷⁶ Sydnee Viray and Robert J. Nash, "Taming the Madvocate Within: Social Justice Meets Social Compassion," in *About Campus* (American College Personnel Association and Wiley Periodicals, 2014), 20.

⁷⁷ Theophilus Ugbedeajo Ejeh, "Compassion—A Uniting and Binding Ethos for Pluralistic Africa," *The Bible and Violence in Africa* (2016): 81.

compassion to be universal for the religions and even for humanity in general.⁷⁸ When thought of as a political program, compassion is the first element of a peace policy that allows the suffering of the other in conflict situations to stand alongside one's own suffering. Thus, one perceives it and integrates mutuality into historical memory. Compassion can also inspire a new politics of recognition since it sets the asymmetrical recognition of treaty partners alongside the symmetrical recognition. Metz implies that any emphatic concept of politics also implies the necessary association of morality and politics. Finally, compassion places cultural and political memory over cultural amnesia, giving space to a memory that cries out for justice and is opposed to political and cultural forgetfulness.⁷⁹

Such, compassion invites people to value everyone's story to listen to the other because the other is equally them. If the story is the struggle then it is the lived experience for all. It is an essential story, about a person of intrinsic worth, with ultimate human dignity.⁸⁰ Compassion is related to mercy, provision, restoration, liberation, and good fortune. It involves personal dignity and helping people find their truest freedom.⁸¹ Compassion can be a very important element for people in motivating and sustaining their activism and drive towards social and political change, particularly when connected to perceptions of injustices.⁸²

⁷⁸ Hille Haker, "Compassion as a Global Program for Christianity," *Concilium* 4 (2001): 55.

⁷⁹ Haker, *Compassion as a Global Program for Christianity*, 56.

⁸⁰ Peter Hosking, "Compassion: What is in a word?" in *The power of Compassion: Exploration of the psychology of Compassion in the 21st Century*, ed. Marion Kostanski (New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publish, 2007), 10.

⁸¹ Hosking, *Compassion: What is in a word?* 4.

⁸² Emma Simpson, Lyn Bender, Cathrine D'Arcy and Heather Gridley, "Mobilizing Compassion as A Catalyst for Social Action: Australian Psychologists' Responses to Asylum Seekers," in *The power of Compassion: Exploration of the psychology of Compassion in the 21st Century*, ed. Marion Kostanski (New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publish, 2007), 14.

In the Hebrew Bible, God is described as showing ‘mercy’ or ‘compassion’ (*rahamim*, connoting the ‘bowels’ or ‘heart’ also the maternal womb or bosom, *raham*). God therefore pardons offences out of merciful love (*hesed*) and unfailing fidelity (*emet*). The prototypical cry of the psalmist is thus the plea for mercy and forgiveness: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1). This helps understand the New Testament portrait of God as “Father of mercies” (2 Corinthians 1:3) Jesus’ disciples are to be merciful “even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). Parables such as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) and the Prodigal Son⁸³ (Luke 15:11-32) beautifully expand on this theme, and in the final judgment scene it is those who have shown practical kindness, even unknowingly, who are admitted to Christ’s kingdom (Matthew 25: 31-46).⁸⁴

This development from the Hebrew Scriptures suggests a theology of compassion as a path for seeking guidance in relating to those living in ethno-religious contexts such as Taraba. This theology of compassion has been firmly rooted in the practical, daily experiences of those who are part of the reality of ethno-religious violence. The seamless connection between praxis and theology, context and text, is fundamental to a progressive Christian response to ethno-religious violence. Catholic thinkers teach that the state, like the family is natural to people. Just as the family is natural to people if they are to reproduce themselves in a human way, the political form of society or the state must exist if they are to live together in a grouping that is more than rudimentary.

⁸³ Or perhaps more appropriately the Prodigal Father, as he is so generous with his love.

⁸⁴ John D’Arcy May, “*Sympathy and Empathy: The Compassionate Bodhisattva and the Love of Christ,*” in *Crossroads Discourses between Christianity and Culture, Currents of Encounter*, 38 editions, eds. Jerald D. Gort, Henry Jansen, W. Stoker and H.M. Vroom (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 395-411.

Human persons work together in the state to achieve three broad goals. First, they pursue together a common ideal of temporal well-being. Second, they adopt means to maintain internal order as they pursue their ideas. Third, they take measures to safeguard the community from attacks by non-members. The first end is meaningful and important because human beings can carry out many human achievements within a political community. They can live fuller lives than they could as isolated individuals or members of rudimentary groups. Co-operation is needed to develop education on a large scale, maintain communications, co-ordinate economic activities and so on. The second end is secured through the administration of the courts and the work of the police. The third end obliges a state to keep up a means of common defense for the community.⁸⁵

In Taraba, the narrative of ethno-religious violence does not seem to end. Yet no religion teaches violence and shedding of blood. Rather, every religion teaches endurance, peaceful co-existence, neighborliness, sanctity of life, and protection of property. If this is the case, all religions have a common meeting place when it comes to virtues.⁸⁶

According to Metz, the modern world is enthroned by a sweeping linear and progressive view of history such that the past is forgotten in an alleged onward march of progress towards unlimited freedom and consumption. Those ignored in this march the poor, exploited, and non western subjects are left to be marginalized or “reprogrammed” by force.⁸⁷ A world in which people, groups, and organizations

⁸⁵ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, “Pastoral Letters and Communiqués, 1960-2002,” 2-3.

⁸⁶ David Ogunbiyi, “Ethno Religious Crisis in Nigeria,” *Global Wealth*, March 6, 2015, <http://globalwealthhipaq.blogspot.com/2015/03/ethno-religious-crises-in-nigeria.html>.

⁸⁷ William T. Cavanaugh, “Dismembering/remembering,” *Common Theology* (2006): 12.

bring careful intentionality to what they are doing, listen to one another with more compassion, and reflect more deeply on the impact of choices on themselves and others would be very different.⁸⁸ A favored Buddhist tenet has it this way: “to experience compassion for others, we must first experience our own pain.”⁸⁹ With compassion, one can look at all of living reality at once and see each other in every being. Embodying the suffering of others leads to the realization of their suffering and impels one to act to extinguish it.⁹⁰ Compassion is assertive, strong, clear, and direct. Compassion feels deeply the suffering of another.⁹¹

Compassion is not only feeling deep sensations of empathetic connection, but also wishing and acting in ways that alleviate suffering. It takes consciousness to turn away from one’s superficial happiness or ego desires. This is essential for experiencing empathy and compassion.⁹² Compassion is ultimately synonymous with being human. It is not the outgrowth of some abstract cause nor does it result in an ideological zeal that the world will be saved if only another accepts one’s precious political or religious message. Change requires persistence and commitment, but first is love, affection, kindness, gentleness, generosity of spirit, and warm-heartedness. This coalesces into acts of compassion toward others.⁹³ Compassion shows others that people understand, and feel, the suffering of others. Compassion requires that people

⁸⁸ Ryan M. Niemiec, "Mindful living: Character strengths Interventions as Pathways for the Five Mindfulness Trainings," *International Journal of Wellbeing* 2, no. 1(2012): 22.

⁸⁹ Candace Walworth, "Engaged Buddhism and Women in Black: Our Grief Is Not a Cry for War," *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* 9, no. 1 (2003-2004): 25.

⁹⁰ Jeff Waistell, "A Buddhist-Communist Manifesto," Buddhism for Sustainable Development and Social Change (Conference Summary, The 11th of International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations day of Vesak, Vietnam, 2014 /2557), 204.

⁹¹ Jacquelyn Ane Rinaldi, "Conflict Resolution without War through the learned Skill of Compassion," (PhD. diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, California, 2016), 61.

⁹² Rinaldi, *Conflict Resolution without War*, 63.

⁹³ Viray and Nash, *Taming the Madvocate Within*, 24.

do everything they can to help alleviate it, and that they respect these others every step of the way.⁹⁴

Solidarity is tied to compassion and has become an all-encompassing catchword. It is important to contextualize the term. Within the realm of social life in Taraba one can locate it within a set of activities. Emphasis placed on the ability to take actions that count, especially when distressing situations unfold. As one resident of a refugee camp put it this way:

Just yesterday, two women delivered here without access to a medical facility and one of the children died hours after delivery. As you can see, we are all sleeping outside in an open field and it has been raining since we came in here on Friday. We are exposed to all forms of diseases. We want government to end the crisis to enable us return to our homes and farms.⁹⁵

Pope Francis challenges Christians to go beyond strict distributive justice, to embrace love, which includes mercy, forgiveness, and compassion. The Church he says must introduce the mystery of love to the world. The Church must promote a civilization of love that includes mercy and forgiveness. Without forgiveness, the world will only have endless tension, violence, and strife.⁹⁶

Metz proposes solidarity as a means of deescalating violence in the world. Metz further expands its application to those who have been vanquished. He adds to solidarity a mystical-political value, namely, the remembrance of the dead. However, Metz is focused on a solidarity among people, not with God, even while the subjects of that solidarity stand before God. Yet, God does not participate in the reality of

⁹⁴ Viray and Nash, *Taming the Madvocate Within*, 25.

⁹⁵ Justin Tyopuusu, "Death Toll in Taraba Herdsmen attack rises to 12, as IDPs lament hardship." Nigerian Pilot, May 17, 2017. www.nigerianpilot.com/death-toll-in-tarba-herdsmen-attack-rise-to-12-as-idps-lament-hardship/

⁹⁶ Pope Francis, *Dives in Misericordia*, sec. 12-15.

solidarity as an observer. Rather, through Jesus Christ, God has a solidarity relationship with each person and the whole of humanity.⁹⁷ Solidarity has its origin in the love of neighbor and is informed by the memories of suffering of those who have gone before. This is solidarity with the vanquished, the dead, the forgotten. “Love of neighbor is not something different from the love of God; it is merely the earthly side of the same coin,” says Metz.⁹⁸

Different religions, cultures, and civilizations can be studied and understood as different strands of an immense human patrimony that can foster human cohesion and solidarity.⁹⁹ Thus, people can engage with the deepest roots of human behavior and the nature of freedom. Armed struggles, corrupt persons, and whole communities all congeal into lasting feelings and attitudes of hatred, bitterness, and vengeance.¹⁰⁰ One such way of changing these situations is through social compassion that brings God to the center of the drama. In Metz’s view, God identifies with every human person at all times. According to him, this idea of God should be the unifying principle that brings peace among people of different cultures and religions. God is the God of all. And it is God’s will to unite all people in love. This principle may be universalized in the sense that all people have the duty of compassion and love for their fellow human beings, taking the example from God. They should be

⁹⁷ Yongho Lee, "Compassion beyond Boundaries, Solidarity Beyond Beliefs: Responding to the Suffering Peoples of Asia Interreligiously-A Comparative study of Christian and Buddhist Perspectives," (PhD diss., Boston College, Chestnut Hill, 2011), 92.

⁹⁸ Marcel Uwineza, "Memory: A Theological Imperative in Post-genocide Rwanda," *Hekima Review* 54 (2016): 55-56.

⁹⁹ George Ehusani, "Christian-Islamic Cooperation in the Building of a Just and Peaceful Society," *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 14 (2002): 29-30.

¹⁰⁰ Breifne Walker, "Catholic Teaching on Revolutionary Armed Force: Is there a Better Way Forward for Moral Theology?" *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 14 (2002): 47.

compassionate as God is compassionate (Luke 6:36), for all have their origin from God who is compassionate.¹⁰¹

This Solidarity and community intersect. As such, theologically rich insights can be found in psychology, anthropological and sociological interpretations regarding communities and affiliated groups. They may help reveal how conflict defines roles, attitudes, and behaviors within an established community. A context approach within a particular ethnic framework helps to make sense of the historical and cultural context of the community. Within Taraba, a critical interpretation of self-interest and power relations manifest themselves in shape shifting and role conflict. The resulting rich description offers deeper understanding of the social dynamics within a contested community. Solidarity is not an abstract virtue but rather exists within such human communities in all their very real challenges.

¹⁰¹ Ejeh, *Compassion: A Uniting and Binding Ethos*, 84.

Chapter Seven: Dialogue of Life as an African Practical Theology

Introduction

The dialogue of life flows from a distinctively African practical theological reflection. As such it builds from the three categories explored in the preceding chapters. These categories connect magisterial teaching regarding a “dialogue of life” originally developed in the context of interreligious dialogue with magisterial social teaching. As such, African experience grounded in a categorical approach to theological reflection, together with this insight linking two sources of Catholic magisterial teaching, are presented as a response to contemporary social violence in Africa, in particular that faced in Taraba state, Nigeria. The “dialogue of life” critically engages everyday life and builds on wisdom found in cultural knowledge and the Christian tradition. It engages African contextual experience of the categories of relationship, narrative, and community. A dynamic shared praxis leads to an appropriate pastoral response. Magisterial teaching thus grows from sources that offer wisdom of how people may conduct their lives and pay respect to their dead.¹

Yet, religion can divide people as much as unite them. Social violence stems from religious divides and religiously based justifications. However, the response to such violence and interreligious dialogue itself also comes from religious sources. The Catholic Church has much to offer in responding to religious violence. Diocesan channels include Justice, Peace and Development commissions in turn are linked to national and international commissions. It has networks of parishes and schools everywhere. Within traditional African society and culture, religiously rooted occasions such as rites of passages and community celebrations are points of contacts where a concrete interplay of relationships, narratives, and community are further

¹ Paul VI. *Evangeli Nuntiandi*.

cemented and refined. Within grassroots religious experience, these resources can serve those who are the first casualties of social violence. Such a dialogue of life lifts up the experience of ordinary people all the more so against a background of inherent deep connections and painfully failed relations.

This research explored the difficulties of interreligious violence and ethnic relations in Taraba State, Nigeria. The conflict is mainly between pastoralists and agriculturalists but demonstrates the effects of ethnic violence in the name of religion as well as a lack of mutual tolerance. The Fulani pastoralists are Muslim and the Tiv, Jukun, and Kuteb agriculturalists are Christian. This can easily turn every crisis into a Christian-Muslim conflict. As mentioned earlier in the work, after pastoralist raid villages and farms of the agricultural communities, their lands are redistributed among collaborating landlords who had acted as middlemen in the crisis. When agriculturalists flee the land for safety, and make their way back, they discover that they have to renegotiate their land from clan heads and district chiefs who sold their land in their absence. As a result, constant clashes, in inter-religious violence must be understood for better relations.

In situation of conflicts and violence, it is critical to get to the root of the matter. Newspaper reports and published materials regarding people of different groups with various ethnic languages, religious traditions, and economic life in Taraba were engaged in this research on dialogue to better understand the situation. The research explored a categorical hermeneutical method to better understand the situation. What is going on? By using a categorical method, three theological categories may be identified. These categories are relationships, narratives and community. These three also offer ways of understanding interreligious violence and conflict in general.

The Situation in Taraba

In Taraba, communal conflicts are part of the interactions between pastoralists and agriculturalists, Christians and Muslims, Fulani, Tiv, Jukun and Kuteb. Conflicts is conceived and experienced indigenously. These divisions are not as simple as they appear on the surface something else is driving them. The specific context in Taraba is crucial. This respects the authenticity and uniqueness of people's particular experiences. It serves as a legitimate protest against the tendency to impose a universal paradigm or totalizing agenda in interreligious and ethnic relations.² A critical importance and departure for interreligious and ethnic violence in Taraba is the recognition that there has been some fruitful encounter and dialogue. Political and economic inequalities are major driving forces creating disharmony among the faith communities in Taraba. Seasonal changes and the search for grazing lands are behind the clashes between the agriculturalists and pastoralists in Taraba.

In Taraba, agriculturalists and pastoralists differ from each other in both principles and practices of land use. Disputes often occur around water sources where farmers grow vegetables in the dry season and herders water their cattle there. When crop damage occurs conflict results as vegetable farmers claim rights to grow vegetable around water sources and that the herdsmen should stop destroying their corps. Herders perceive this as sabotage since their cattle need to get water somewhere.³ At the same time, in Taraba and surrounding areas, Muslims and Christians live side by side, even in the same household. Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion may be practiced within the same extended family.

² Akintunde E. Akinade, "The Precarious Agenda: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Nigeria," Class Lecture, High Point University, North Carolina, summer 2002, 1.

³ Bolarinwa Kolade Kamilu, Oluwakemi Enitan Fapojuwo and Foloruso Ibrahim Ayanda, "Conflict Resolution Strategies among Farmers in Taraba State Nigeria," *OIDA: International Journal of Sustainable Development* 05, no. 01(2012): 12.

Many adherents of Christianity and Islam speak the same language and are from the same ethnic group. Societal divisions are not simple and are not based only on religion. Ultimately, interreligious violence as well as positive ethnic relations hangs in relationships. For Christians, God's self-revelation can only be in relationship since God reveals God self as a Trinitarian community of persons. The experience of the Eucharist profoundly reveals a deeper sense of relationship. The recent synod of bishops⁴ speak in terms of relationships and metaphors of relationship familial, Trinitarian, and communal. Further, human beings are hardwired for connections biologically and psychologically. Humans survive and thrive through relationship. Relationships help people grow, heal, and become more fully whom they are meant to be. Relationships give meaning and anchor human lives.⁵

Relationships

A practical theological understanding of the three way intersection between relationships, narratives, and community is rich in African cultural values. It builds on who people are, reflecting life in Taraba state. Metz offers a way to enter into this via a phenomenological focus.

Metz's phenomenological style of reflection gives historical depth, enmeshed as it is within the bloody tapestry of human history, comprised as it is of sorrow, joy and acute human experiences, especially that of suffering.⁶

As already stated in the work, Taraba has about 80 indigenous ethnic groups, each of which has its own culture and way of life. These are manifested in languages,

⁴ XIV Ordinary General Assembly, "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World," The Final Report of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father Pope Francis, Vatican City, October 24, 2015.

⁵ Annie Wright, "A Care Package for Your Relationship," accessed June 29, 2016, <http://anniewrightpsychotherapy.com/2015/09/a-care-package-for-your-relationship/>.

⁶ Donald L. Wallenfang, "Listen to Me: The Soteriology of Johann Baptist Metz and its Effect on Ministry with Adolescents," Paper proposed for Concilium Symposium at Loyola University Chicago, June, 2009, 5.

culinary choices, artifacts, house types, dress, and technologies. They can also be seen in art, song and belief systems. Culture is taught, learned, and shared as the knowledge acquired is passed from generation to generation. Communities should make conscious effort to pass on their painful histories to the younger generation. This work hopes that making a conscious effort to pass on the sorrows and pains of violence as part of the culture of Taraba State would awaken future generation to avoid the path of violence.

In addition to above, efforts should be made to document account of the happenings in Taraba State. Even though everyone knows that Taraba has been wrecked with violence it should be in an official gazette. While recognizing the current levels of violence in Taraba, there are hardly any records of violent conflicts, ethnic or religious as having taken place during the pre-independence times in territories considered part of Taraba today. On the contrary, there is evidence of ethnic collaboration between the indigenous Jukun and Tiv groups to ward off the Fulani invasion before the arrival of colonial administration.⁷ Post-independent political arrangements and the creation of new states led to hostilities between different ethnic groups with different religious affiliations within Taraba. Relationships between these groups are at its worst since the creation of the state. This is far from the African culture which builds on relationships. In Taraba and elsewhere on the continent, it is expected that relationships would be built into the daily life interactions of the people. The power of everyday relationships as presented in proverbs, reverence for ancestors, and respect for elders, all point to the strength of

⁷ Abdulbarkindo Adamu and Alupse Ben, "Violent Conflict in Divided Societies the Case Study of Violent Conflict in Taraba State (2013 - 2015): The Deeper Reality of the Violent Conflict in Taraba State and the Plight of Christians," *Nigeria Conflict and Security Analysis Network Working Paper 2* (2015): 12.

African relationships and could be a starting point for evolving an African practical theology on relationships.

The Church's focus in Taraba State may be on how identity and experience are shaped by relationships understood in the light of scripture and tradition. In the tradition of the church Relationships maybe viewed from the perspective of sin and reconciliation. Sin is about reconciling people with God. Relationship is central to the Trinity, and similarly it is central to God's people. It is not enough to be engaged in collaborating and working together. It is not just about task. It is not just about results. It is about dwelling in unity, love, honor, and respect as the work is moving ahead. This is vital. There can be no separation in spirit between what is done (task) and how it is done (relationships). There is no division between the Persons of the Godhead and their actions; everything they do is in line with who they are. As the Body of Christ, Christians must do the same. There must be a focus and investment in relationships.⁸ However, relationship as developed in the teaching of the Trinity allows space for the created individual, but only in relationship to the other. So each person of the Trinity has its own divine nature, expressed in relation to the other persons of the Trinity. There is the space to be each divine person, as each person relates to the other. They cannot each exist without this relationship.⁹ The Synod of Bishops' second special assembly for Africa decried the situation of poor relations among followers of Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions, citing

⁸ Enoch Wan and Kevin Penman, "The Trinity: A Model for Partnership in Christian Missions," *Global Missiology English* 3, no. 7 (2010): 24.

⁹ Cathy Ross, "The Theology of Partnership," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 3 (2010):146.

distrust and rivalries between these groups. Mistrust on all sides hinders peaceful dialogue and mutual understanding.¹⁰

Narratives

Narratives are another critical category in the reflection on interreligious violence in Taraba and could act as a stepping stone for the “dialogue of life.” This may be studied and possibly appropriated as a Catholic response to the conflicts in Taraba. Africans are storytellers par excellence. Stories play a critical role in framing and reproducing African culture. The rich oral tradition is central to the dynamism of African culture and social relationships. These stories are rich in proverbs, idioms, and sayings. They reflect the lived wisdom of everyday people. The African approach to story reflects something in Christian scriptures and hagiography, conversion accounts, and other stories of believers, catechists, and leaders at all levels.

In Taraba, marriages between Christians and Muslims are celebrated with joy and traditional festivities. Most ethnic groups in the state have many examples of such inter religious marriages. During naming ceremonies and other celebrations of new life, the atmosphere is that of joy, peace, and blessings. But such scenes of joy quickly disappear in the fact of situations of violence. Victims and perpetrators are then tasked with the discomfort of trying to build a community heavily polarized by such situations. This is a task faced by all, including the church. Pope Benedict’s used a biological metaphor to capture the mood of the church in Africa. As the pontiff notes: “A precious treasure is to be found in the soul of Africa, where I perceive a ‘spiritual

¹⁰ Synod of Bishops, “II Special Assembly for Africa: Instrumentum Laboris,” in *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2009).

lung' for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope."¹¹ This spiritual lung lives and breathes through stories of life, of survival, resilience, and flourishing.

Community

Christian correlates their stories with the story of Christ, who bid Christians to be a community of believers, the church. The community may be understood as church for Christians, the Muslims understand their community life as the *Umaa*, which is interpreted as the universal community. The Catholic Christian story is that of relationship and community. The African understanding of community, builds on narratives and relationships as well as community, in turn shaping everyday ecclesiology. Communities in Taraba are highly indigenous and still hold to traditional ways of life particular to Africans. Their beliefs, practices, ceremonies, festivals, religious objects, values, or leaders are all typical the way of life of Africans. In many communities in Taraba, rites of passage, ceremonies, and festivals express religious practices and show their beliefs in practical terms. They include praying, making sacrifices and offerings, performing ceremonies and rituals, and observing various customs. Festivals are normally joyful occasions when people sing, dance, eat, and celebrate a particular occasion or event. Festivals mark the period of harvest, the start of the rains, the birth of a child, and victory over enemies.

Similarly, values and morals cover extensive topics such as truth, justice, love, right and wrong, good and evil, beauty and decency, respect for people and property. In particular, the keeping of promises and agreements, praise and blame, crime and punishment, the rights and responsibilities of both the individual and community which include character, integrity and many more. It correlates with stories of God's people building up the church. At some level, all scripture and tradition reveal such a

¹¹ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*.

connectedness. Catholic magisterial teaching on social justice and interreligious dialogue is a critical resource for the Catholic Church in Africa as it faces situations of interreligious violence and ethnic relations. Theology invites a sharing community to promote a practical dialogue of life.

Towards a Dialogue of Life

Interreligious dialogue is much more than representatives of two or more different faith traditions sitting together and discussing their doctrines and practices. Such dialogue is key or four main forms theological exchange, religious experience, life and actions. The dialogue of life comes to fruition in the day-to-day activities of people's lives.¹² This leads to a dialogue of action, present when people of different religious traditions work together on social issues to bring about peace in the world and help those in need.¹³ Such modes of dialogue are open to all people irrespective of educational level, social standing, or religious status. As such, they avoid the dangers of elitism and intellectualism inherent in a dialogue of theological exchange. They alone are able to correct biases and prejudices, ease deep seated hatreds, heal ancient wounds and forge a new way of life because they promote day to day communication and sharing, grassroots activism for justice, and above all, common and communitarian experiences of the divine or the absolute.¹⁴

These three categories can engage both pastoralists and agriculturalists as they enter into the dialogue of life within Taraba State. The dialogue of life helps establish peaceful coexistence among divided peoples through their everyday lives.

¹² Anna Zaros, "Interreligious Dialogue and the Issue of Jerusalem in the Israel - Palestinian Conflict," *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 33, no. 2(2009): 8.

¹³ Zaros, *Interreligious Dialogue and the Issue of Jerusalem*, 8.

¹⁴ Peter C. Phan, "Peace Building and Reconciliation: Inter religious Dialogue and Catholic Spirituality," *Peace Building: Catholic Theology, Ethics and Praxis*, eds. Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby and Gerald F. Powers (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 334-335.

The effect of this sort of dialogue might be difficult to pinpoint, but it is nonetheless deeply integrated into people's daily activities.¹⁵ Such dialogue occurs when practical questions of living together in diverse communities are answered in a manner consistent with religious convictions. The failure to resolve conflicting answers to these questions can, and all too often do, result in hostilities or bloodshed. There are alternatives that have deep roots in traditions of both Muslims and Christians. Such avenues can provide for peaceful resolution and growth in mutual understanding. These alternatives include dialectical exchange and debate as well as legal negotiation. Such work supports conversation within the religious community itself no less the discussion among representatives and whole communities.¹⁶ In the encyclical, *Ecclesia Suam* Paul VI makes it clear "here, then, Venerable Brethren, is the noble origin of this dialogue: in the mind of God Himself. Religion of its very nature is a certain relationship between God and man. It finds its expression in prayer and prayer is a dialogue."¹⁷

Some method treat people as agents of understanding and self-understanding while others treat people as if they were texts whose content the interpreter can objectify through surveys and "professionally conducted" interviews.¹⁸ Inter-religious dialogue does care both about people and their texts by paying attention to the multiple voices involved in the process of understanding. In this sense, multiple voices refers not only to the textual sources and scholarly communities but also the multiple voices of living religious traditions and especially the voice of the

¹⁵ Zaros, *Interreligious Dialogue and the Issue of Jerusalem*, 14.

¹⁶ Sandra Toenies Keating, "Interreligious Dialogue with Muslims: Reflections on Yesterday and Today," *The International Journal of African Catholicism* (2011): 56.

¹⁷ Paul VI, *Ecclesia Suam*, sec. 70.

¹⁸ Abraham Velez De Cea, "Interreligious Dialogue as a Method of Understanding: The Case of Raimundo Panikkar," *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue* 03(2010): 108.

interpreter.¹⁹ Paying attention to such multiple voices and various encounters, suggests how each circumstance can relate to such voices. A few instances suffice: From the narratives, text, and metaphors that all religions share regarding their understanding of God. Such myths, legends, wise sayings, and beliefs show how people with such diverse religious experiences gain the ability to reach beyond the scope of their own experience through a careful engagement in the dialogue of life and action. When people narrate their stories using the language of myths, analogies, events and experience as they have seen, the thought uppermost in the dialogue is to promote a positive and open spirit in a reciprocal knowledge of listening and understanding. Understandably, the language of narratives, relationships and community can be most helpful in this exchange and offers critical support to the Catholic Church's mission of fostering a dialogue of life in Nigeria.

Mission and Dialogue

A specific arm of the Catholic Church in Nigeria deals with mission and dialogue. The Department of Mission and Dialogue co-ordinates and facilitates activities of the Nigerian Catholic Bishops' Conference in this area, including missions and missionary animation, ecumenism, dialogue within the family of the Church, and dialogue with other religious bodies. This arm of the Catholic Bishops' Conference is charged with monitoring training and sending of priests, religious, and lay missionaries to needy parts of Nigeria and of world. The unit is in touch with agencies within and outside the country that are committed to the Church's missionary mandate. The department has three units, each of which is headed by a secretary. The director of the department is also the secretary of dialogue. This structure offers an opportunity to foster the dialogue of life within the Catholic Church in Taraba State.

¹⁹ De Cea, *Interreligious Dialogue as a Method of Understanding*, 108.

Dialogue in the Catholic Diocese of Jalingo

In his remark at the opening of one of its sessions the director of dialogue offered, “it is my hope that we shall have deliberations here today that will set the task of dialogue in this diocese on the right path. Our diocese is a particular Church within the Universal. It is only natural therefore that we also work in tandem with the universal church.”²⁰ Interestingly, “the office of dialogue in Jalingo diocese is one. The same body handles both the ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues.”²¹ Since the priests and religious are leaders in their respective parishes, and other local settings, they are at the forefront of ensuring that dialogue moves forward in different parts of the Catholic Diocese of Jalingo. Accordingly, activities of the department of dialogue include encouraging priests and religious as well as the lay faithful to be more involved in ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. They also are charged to encourage a more active part in the activities of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) at the local and state government levels. As such, they also are tasked with initiating moments for inter-denominational prayer services. Since priests are key local leaders, a concerted effort is made to encourage the priests to engage in dialogue with other faith traditions.

Interaction of the Presbyterium on Dialogue

Dialogue has a very important role to play in the Diocese of Jalingo. Given ethnic tensions, relations and violence experienced over the years has made dialogue a necessity. For this reason, dialogue is frequently promoted and activities relating to dialogue are intensified at most diocesan functions.

²⁰Kieran Danfulani, “Opening Remarks Given at an Interaction of the Jalingo Diocesan Presbyterium on Interreligious Dialogue,” *Initial Manuscripts*, October, 30, 2012, 1.

²¹Kieran Danfulani, “A Report of Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue in Jalingo Diocese, Taraba State, Nigeria,” Unpublished Manuscripts, September, 2013, 1.

Diocesan General Assembly

Every year, the bishop, priests, religious, and representatives of the laity and lay organizations and associations within the diocese meet for some days to discuss the state of affairs in the diocese and strategize on how to forge ahead. Dialogue is now a key element in the deliberations of the diocese. These gatherings of priests, religious, and laity have come to accept that to engage more in dialogue than violence resolves differences is the only path to healing. This has become a cardinal objective of the whole diocese, are deeply integrated into its organization and structure.

Diocesan Year of Faith Celebration

The church in the Diocese of Jalingo marked its Year of Faith celebration with the theme: “Celebrating the Faith of Our Fathers.” Presentations on different aspects of the faith were made and the topic, “The Necessity of Dialogue for Peaceful Coexistence,” was addressed. These presentations showcased the relational difficulties encountered over the years on three levels: inter ethnic, interdenominational and interreligious. After the presentation, issues were debated. Emphasis was given to the place of dialogue, thus making the case that there is no alternative to peace but dialogue.

Deaneries

This dialogue then went to the deanery level. Its target was the women religious (men religious are part of the *presbyterium*), catechists, organizations, associations, and societal leaders. This will go on and on until the smallest units of the diocesan set-up are duly covered. Given the kind of enthusiasm and interest that attended the interaction at the level of the *presbyterium*, dialogue seems to be the path that will move the diocese from strength to strength. Dialogue is an issue that is dear to the heart of the Bishop of the diocese. Further, the ‘Interfaith Forum’ (a corporate-

sponsored group) generously gave the diocese six thousand books. These books have been distributed to the various diocesan Catholic schools. The Catholic Church's partners in dialogue also have copies. The plan for the future is to create a situation where dialogue is placed into the curriculum of all diocesan institutions. In this way, children begin to learn about dialogue (both ecumenical and interreligious) at an early stage in life. As the saying goes, "catch them young."

Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations

The present political climate in Taraba State has opened the eyes of Christians. Over the years, the impression has been given that certain conflicts are merely ethnic. However, the crisis that engulfed the southern and central parts of the state has shown that the issue is both political and religious. Accordingly, Christians are now more aware that they must be united to face this crisis.

Over the years, the bishop has repeatedly encouraged the faithful in his diocese to be more involved in the activities of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Certainly, within the last few years, laity and clergy alike have been more involved in the activities of CAN. In fact, some priests have been elected as leaders of CAN at the level of the Local Government Area, where they have provided good leadership. This efforts and involvement of priests and Catholic lay faithful in the leaderships and direction of CAN show how the people of God in Taraba are getting more involved in dialogue.

Taraba today has been polarized along religious lines, but politics is at the base of the problem. The southern part of the state is especially affected. Urban centers like Wukari have experienced considerable unrests. At each instance, lives and properties are lost. Other urban centers which border Wukari like Ibi has had its own share of unrest and crisis. In recent times, some parts of Ibi local government

area are engrossed in crises. Interfaith relations that have been critically built over the years have been lost. Sad to say all this, calls for serious concern.

The biggest challenge facing ecumenical relations is the problematic connection between some church leaders and the local or state government. For example, some religious leaders behave and carry themselves around as if they were agents of the government. They do all this so as to have access to juicy government appointments or money. These sorts of relations are very troubling and work against cementing fruitful dialogue with the government of the state. The proliferation of churches and self-appointed bishops who head these churches are counter productive to the common cause of dialogue and ecumenical relations. Unfortunately, the government does not know the difference between bishops who are out to take advantage of religion for their personal gain and those that are more interested in the common good. Sadly, such people give the government the impression that the Catholic Church is antagonistic to the government. This leaves members of these other denominations with the impression that the Catholic Church cannot help them.

What Needs to Happen?

The high level of mutual suspicion and mistrust demands that something need to be done. Practical theology serves as an interpretative tool and draws from the context that privilege human experience. Such labors result from the dialogue of life as well as actions in understanding the pain of conflicts, divisions, and displacement experienced in Taraba.²² Various measures can be adapted to deal with the prevailing conflicts that rocks Taraba today. One such conflict resolution method is the transformational approach. Transformational conflict resolution is a new concept that provokes minds to look inward taking social trends into consideration. This ensures

²² Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, ed., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 20.

that things are done to be more proactive rather than being destructive. Some people are complaining of being suppressed and not heard. If there is a problem facing someone, all the parties must sit down and discuss. No one should impose anything on another person. There should be mutual negotiations.²³ Theology itself can and should be the subject of critical reflection and challenge.²⁴ The theological center of gravity for practical theology is God's action mediated through human action.²⁵ God relies on human agency to witness to truth nonviolently. God relies on human agency precisely because God is the God of history in truth and power, yet 'refuses to compel compliance or agreement by force'. The truth God offers puts limits on the actions Christians may perform. Christians have the luxury of witnessing to a truth they did not create and cannot defeat, but which claims them only when they renounce the temptation to promulgate it violently.²⁶

Creating healing and trauma centers can provide a platform for processing, updating, and expanding on the dangerous memories that has generated such bad blood in Taraba. Such centers, located within safe confines of the state and equipped with needed, skilled staff, will be a major step in the dialogue of life in Taraba. Taraba has many ethnic groups and cultures. Its festivals and ceremonies colorfully celebrate the richness of the state and its people. Many times these celebrations have ended in clashes and disturbances. However, they remain a crucial means to showcase the best of the state. Empowering a commission on culture to collaborate with

²³ Bolarinwa Kolade Kamilu, Oluwakemi Enitan Fapojuwo and Foloruso Ibrahim Ayanda, "Conflict Resolution Strategies among Farmers in Taraba State Nigeria," *OIDA: International Journal of Sustainable Development* 05, 01(2012): 12-13.

²⁴ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 90.

²⁵ Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory and Action Domains* (Michigan: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 8.

²⁶ Joseph M. Incandela, "Playing God: Divine Activity, Human Activity and Christian Ethics," *Crosscurrent* 46, Issue 1(1996): 64.

different ethnic groups and religious traditions on memories of the living and dead can help improve relations and deepen communal peace. This recognizes practical theological import that is action based and woven into a dialogue of life. Such a need becomes even more urgent as general elections draw near. Similarly, the Committee on Dialogue and the Justice, Development and Peace/Caritas (J.D.P/C) of the diocese is focused on youth development, empowerment and transformation as a specific thrust in building and improving relations amongst youths in the state. It has mapped out plans and programs that will involve Muslim and Christian youths. The plan is to draw resource persons from the Muslim Council and the Federation of Muslim Women Associations (FOMWAN) as well as other Christian groups in the state. These groups have been major partners, leading to many deep collaborations. The main thrust of this program is to help young people see that battles in the name of religion are counterproductive and contrary to their faith.

Part of the state remains vulnerable to crises. In Dampar and Sarkin-Kudu villages within Ibi Local Government Area, violence has not abated. The situation must be monitored so that first respondents may be dispatched to these areas to manage the situation. They provide temporary shelters, safe spaces, attend to the injured, collate information on internal displaced persons, attend to people with traumatic experience, and offer spiritual support. As members of this combined partnership of J.D.P/C and the committee on dialogue of Jalingo diocese work in close collaboration with nongovernmental and government agencies alike to promote calm in the affected communities. Dialogue involves many difficulties. But, Danfulani recalls,

...in a parish where I gave a talk on the necessity of dialogue, a young man asked what to do if dialogue fails. I simply told him to embark on yet another

round of dialogue. All I wanted to tell him was that there is no viable alternative to dialogue. We pray that God gives everyone the grace to understand this reality.²⁷

Advocacy Visits

Between December 2016 and April 2017, parts of Jalingo diocese were engulfed in conflict between the Fulani and Tiv ethnic groups. Although this was basically an inter-ethnic feud, it was also given a religious interpretation by many. This crisis resulted in the loss of lives. Homes and churches were torched, farms and farm produce destroyed, and many residents were displaced. After the security operatives brought the situation under control, the main task was to resettle the residents and help them heal and learn to live in peace with each other again.

In collaboration with the J.D.P/C, a team on the ground is made up of FOMWAN, the Muslim Council, and a variety of Christian denominations. In the month of May 2017, the J.D.P/C of Jalingo diocese made available funds to transport the team to visit areas seriously affected by the crisis. Together with traditional rulers, priests and pastors visited those areas and discussed the importance of peaceful co-existence with the people. That Muslims and Christians were able to travel and even pray together in these places was quite symbolic to residents of those areas. Even the religious leaders in the communities affected were able to agree on the need to continue to work together and ensure that religion is not used as a source of conflict when crises erupt in communities.

The strength of Christians is in their unity. Such unity should not come out of political convenience but because it is the will of Christ. Local efforts are evident, as reported by the director of dialogue in the Catholic Diocese of Jalingo. “In the month

²⁷ Danfulani, *A Report of Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1-2.

of March 2017, the Bishop sent me to represent him at the Synod of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Jos Diocese, which took place in Jalingo. I gave the Bishop's address in which he emphasized preaching the gospel without demonizing each other and working at a closer partnership with the Methodist Church."²⁸ The sentiment expressed drew excitement from the Methodist Bishop of Jos Diocese, Nigeria (Rt. Rev. I. K. Chindo) and the lay president present. These assurances of the readiness to partner and collaborate are powerful. Such is the kind of partnership critical for peace in the years ahead.

²⁸ Danfulani, *A Report of Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*, 2.

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