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Contents

Titles	Page
Select Nameless Women Peacebuilders in the Hebrew Bible Caroline N. Mbonu	1
Women Virginity in African Traditional Religion and Old Testament with Its Position in Twenty- First Century Ayodeji Olanrewaju, Ogidiolu Ph.D	19
A theological reflection on PS. 23 for church survival in a declining economy Very Rev. Dr. Olugbemi, O. Berekiah	33
Poverty as Social Injustice in The Old Testament: A Reading of Micah 6:8 In The Nigerian Context Mr. Moses Idemudia & Prof. Amadi E. Ahiamadu	53
The Concept of “Shalom” In The Old Testament and African Perspective Professor D. D. Adegbite & Dada Hannah Toluwase & Ojekanmi Olaoluwa Sunmoluwa	69
Dialogue of the Guilty: A Biblical Approach to Peacebuilding in the Violent Context of Nigeria Rev. Yusuf J. Luxman PhD	79
Biblical Exegesis James Edo Ikwulono	97
Leadership and Management from Old Testament Figures: Lessons for Responsible Leadership in Nigeria Prof. Emmanuel Ordue Usue & Isaac Asongo Ngobua	115
The Nature of Peacebuilding in Matthew 5:9 and its Implications for Christians in Africa Abel Adeyemi Alamu, PhD	135

Household Code in Ephesians 6:1-4 and the Traditional Yoruba Household Code: A Comparative Analysis Adewale J. Adelakun, PhD	149
The Discourse on the Emmaus Way (Luke 24: 13-49) And Decolonising African Biblical Hermeneutics Funke Elizabeth Oyekan, PhD & Oyekemi Moromoke Oyekan	167
Galatian Human Freedom According to Isaiah: The Significance of ὁ ἀπολύτωσης ἐν Χριστῷ in the Pauline Argumentation Honor Sewapo, PhD	185
The Righteous Zacchaeus: A Re-Reading of Luke 19:1-10 Ubong Ekpenyong Eyo, Ph.D.	203
Pauline Contextualization Paradigm in Acts 17:22-34: A Response to The Relevance of the Gospel in A Multi-Religious Africa: Cross River State as A Case Study Enebieni E. Eko, Ph.D & Iheanacho M. Alala, Ph.D. & Dimgba D. Esowe, Ph.D.	217
“Peace on Earth” (Luke 2:14): The Politics of Peace and Peacebuilding in St. Luke Funke Elizabeth Oyekan, PhD	243
Sell Your Cloak and Buy a Sword (Luke 22: 35-38): Meaning, Purpose and Lessons for the Nigerian Church Daniel James Tali (Ph.D)	257
Apostle Paul's Pattern of Church Planting in Romans 10:1-17: A Model for Contemporary Churches in Nigeria Samuel Sunday Alamu & Olulowo Segun Ayotunde, PhD	277

Inculturation Missionary Practice of Paul in Acts 17: 18-25, A Design for The Seventh – Day Adventist Church in Nigeria Iheanacho Mendel Alala, Ph.D, & Dimgba Dimgba Esowe, Ph.D. & Eko, Eniebeni Eneiben, Ph.D	293
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The Peace of God as Transformation Motif for Societal Change (Phil 4:6-7) Prof. Igbakua Iorjaah	309
--	------------

The Angel of the Abyss (Rev 9:11) in John's Theopolitics Prof. Igbakua Iorjaah	333
---	------------

Prophetic Recklessness, Infidelity and Insecurity in Modern Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Causes, Effects and Possible Solutions Iyanda Abel Olatoye	351
--	------------

Abiyamo Se Owo Kotopo Na Omo E: An African Assessment of Yahweh's Punitive Action Against Israel and Implications for the Contemporary Church Ebenezer Ola. Adeogun Ph.D	369
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THE PEACE OF GOD AS TRANSFORMATION MOTIF FOR SOCIETAL CHANGE (PHIL 4:6-7)

Prof. Igbakua Iorjaah

Benue State University Makurdi,
07086803725; iiorjaah@bsum.edu.ng

Abstract

In the last two decades there has been a serious dethronement of peace in Nigeria due to sharp increase in religious-based terrorist activities. This scenario excited the rise of many peacebuilding organisations to restore peace, but their efforts have so far failed. This study set out to establish the basis for the present situation and the way forward. Employing historical and ideological analyses for the crisis situation and exegetical analysis for a biblical theological solution to it, the study discovered that: the organisations have erroneously ignored or misunderstood the ideological basis of the crisis, hence the need for a theological solution. They have all along emphasised this-worldly transient public relational peace instead of the sustainable internal (emotional and mental) personal "peace of God", thereby missing the mark in solutions so far being proffered. The peace of God pertains to the harmony and good order of God that he gifts to humans as the relief of anxiety grounded in the assurance that God knows, is capable, and willing to control our challenges. God's peace is experiential and appropriated by first making peace with the God of peace through faith in Jesus Messiah. Nigerians need to know this peace and the way to getting it as Paul explains it, imbibe it, and utilise it to be able to live a harmonious and profitable brotherhood. This discourse therefore calls on the Christian community in Nigeria to rise up to its divinely assigned responsibility to communicate the peace of God to all and sundry.

Background

If there is anything the world desperately needs now and is yearning to do whatever it takes to get it, it is peace. The many peacebuilding organisations popping up across the globe testify to this fact. A google search generated 104 such organisations in Nigeria alone. These bodies have emerged, especially in the last two decades, in response to the astonishing increase in cases of violent conflicts being perpetrated mostly by terrorist groups. In Nigeria these groups' activities have badly punctured public (relational) peace and have almost despaired citizens of any idea of personal (internal, emotional and

mental) peace. Unfortunately, the determined efforts of the many peacebuilding bodies from various fronts to restore peace to Nigeria so far seem to be a mirage. One then asks, why have they failed?

This study found that, the prime factor, among others, that has dispelled peace in Nigeria is the perception of the non-member of a particular ideology (mostly religious) as the enemy. The battle line is largely between Islam and the other faiths in Nigeria. Most of the terrorist activities that have dispelled peace in Nigeria are perpetrated by Islamic groups. Based on their speeches, these terrorists' central ideology, which underlies and undergirds their violence and terror, is the establishment over Nigeria of a theocracy, a political empire ruled on Islamic law, *shari'a*, and headed by "a religious leadership" for the emergence of a better society to replace democracy, which is man-made, frail, and has always failed (Qur'an 20:24). The Muslim's assumption underlying a pure Islamic state [*ummah*] is that, men are incapable of discriminating between right and wrong by their unaided powers. Thus, the government of the State must be theocracy. A supporting ideology is the Islamic brainwashing myth of martyrdom, which makes some Muslims believe that if a Muslim sacrifices their life in the course of fighting to eliminate infidels, s/he will have automatic ticket to paradise as a martyr and will be glorified and enjoy the fruits of victory in this life if s/he w 's in the jihadic battle.

These activities instilled fear of Islamic domination (religious-, political-, and economic wise) in the predominantly Christian communities of the Middle Belt and Southern Nigeria and consequently, excited a series of reprisal "terror groups" from the threatened communities. Bob Brown Chinda makes this clear when enumerating the imbalances that necessitated the struggle for a separate Igbo state through the activities of MASSOB which transformed to IPOB that was very quickly declared a terrorist group by the Nigerian federal government.

This makes the discourse about peace in Nigeria a theological one. Peace in Nigeria is mostly disturbed due to forceful (violent) attempts to impose Islamic ideologies on non-Muslims. This violence, which comes in physical, structural, psychological and other forms, is blatant abuse of life (power) by the Muslims, which in Biblical perspective is a direct affront on God (Gen 9:6; Lev 17:4; Mat 26:54; Rom 13:4). However, so far, indications are that the peacebuilding organisations in Nigerian have not fully understood this ideological basis of the displacement of peace in order to tackle it aright. Nigerians' search for peace is misdirected toward external, this-worldly public peace instead of the internal,

personal peace of God. From the Biblical turf, we understand that, "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain; unless the LORD protects the city, its watchmen stand guard in vain" (Psa 127:1).

Of a fact, the terrorist activities that have expelled peace in Nigeria are excited by so varied dynamic forces that they are difficult formerly human efforts to curb. The most disturbing undercurrent is the terrorist groups' affiliation with foreign terrorist groups with Islamist jihadist agenda. Boko Haram factions have been receiving training by Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) since 12 March 2015 and have similar cooperative links with the Somalian militant group al Shabaab. Thus, powered by Al Qaeda's global Islamisation agenda, Boko Haram vows to, as a religious duty, "kill and eliminate irresponsible political leaders of all leanings ... who oppose the rule of Sharia in Nigeria."

One is further concerned that Boko Haram, which started as a single and simple peripheral deviant group, quite rapidly multiplied and today is found in various faces, such as terrorist groups like Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Islamic State West Africa (ISWA), Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS), Al Murabitoun, and Ansar Dine. Worse still, since 2022, all its factions have cells around Nigeria's seat of power; a sophisticated network that apparently will therefrom spread out to all major cities and takeover the entire nation, just as the Taliban did and captured power in Afghanistan on 15 August 2021, in the insurgent offensive that began in May 2021. In view of the action plan for the takeover agenda announced by the successor of Muhammed Yusuf, the founding leader of Boko Haram, "which some repentant members of the group confirmed to Obadiah Mailafia," the establishment of cells near Abuja by all the terrorist groups, viewed with the lens of their history, further pushes away any hope of public and personal peace from Nigerians.

The rapid multiplication of the terrorist groups is paralleled by a corresponding increase in the barbaric conflicts, owing largely to the terrorists' use of digital media as their propaganda mechanism to spread their hate speech and extremism and thereby promote their ideologies and expand membership network. Espousing, at the same time, overt and covert benefits of terrorism, "they easily convince and recruit the uninformed both from the illiterate masses and surprisingly, the elite, which seems to make their mode of operation also evolve in complexity. Another issue of serious concern is these Islamist terrorists' collaboration with other criminal gangs, like Fulani herders' militias,

Prohibited by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for its operations, thus complicating the process of managing the crisis. The Fulani were initially kidnapping for the terrorists for a pay but are now apparently autonomous and even deadlier than the terror groups that trained them. The training of the Fulani militias by the Al Qaeda-trained Boko Haram, the linking of the terrorists' activities with Usman Dan Fodio's jihad of 1804-1808 by Fulani militias," and especially Nigerian government's unperturbed attitude towards the terrorists' activities, among other indicators, seem to implicate President Buhari's government in the peace-expulsion agenda. The highly celebrated Kidnapping Kingpin, Bello TurjiKachalla, openly stated, in a viral video still in circulation, that his group's activities are being sponsored by the federal government." The government has maintained silence and has curiously failed to transparently go after them.

Owing to this complex nature of the problem, my task in this discourse is to remind Nigerians to seek the peace of God for sustainable peace. The discourse therefore attempts to direct Nigerians' search for peace to God's teaching in the Bible. I argue that Nigeria, and the world for that matter, can attain public serenity, equilibrium, and therefore wellbeing only when it stops focussing exclusively on this-worldly, public peace and embraces the personal, emotional and mental "peace of God."

This call is informed by the fact that, in the midst of all the heart-throbbing chaos, we are asked to "*let the peace of Christ [God] rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace*" (Col 3:5). This mandate is heart-warming. But it also presents a big challenge: in that this "one body" includes Muslims and other religious faithful as John 3:16 implies. How can the widely polarised Nigerian Christianity work together with Islam to realise their oneness so as to get that peace of God in Nigeria?

Working with the topic "The Peace of God' as Transformation Motif for Societal Change (Phil 4:7)" I first, dissect the concept, "the peace of God" (Phil 4:7) and then explore ways this Biblical understanding of peace can help Nigerians appropriate that peace which is the prerogative of the God of Peace (Heb. 13:20) to gift to humanity. The background to the concept "Peace of God" (Phil 4:7) is explored for readers to gain familiarity with the subject. I then explore the Greeks' conception of εἰρήνη *eirēnē*, peace, and its NT usage in light of the OT use of שָׁלוֹם *shalom*, peace, to uncover their possible influence on Christian conception of the "peace of God". Thereafter, I exegete and exposit Philippians 4:6-7 and then I examine causes of the absence of the



peace of God in Nigeria today and finally, discuss ways of appropriating “the peace of God” for societal change in Nigeria and draw conclusions based on findings from the preceding exercises.

Definitional Discourse on εἰρήνη *eirēnē*, PEACE

The Greek Context of εἰρήνη *eirēnē*

The Greek word for peace is εἰρήνη *eirēnē*. Its etymology is uncertain, but it probably derives from the primary word εἰρωεῖρō, which denotes *joining or tying things together* to become a *wholeso* as to achieve harmony and wellbeing. Thus, semantically, in classical Greek, εἰρήνη *eirēnē* primarily meant a state of being which generally denoted a time or state of peace—when there is no war or violent conflicts, or “the condition resulting from cessation of war”, yielding a peaceful frame of mind. This conception precludes peaceful “relationships” which were usually characterised by words like φίλια *philia* (love, friendship) or ὁμονοία *homonoia* (unity, concord) and γαλήνη *galēnē* (calm). This indicates that, classical Greek’s usage of peace was dictated and undergirded by realpolitik. In this vein, every Greek city had a superintendent of its public peace to ensure the prevalence of calmness in the city. Noteworthy, this peace was made and built on the platform of religion. Athens, for instance, was protected by the goddess of wisdom whose statue bore an olive branch, the symbol of peace, and a spear to defend the peace.

εἰρήνη *eirēnē* in the NT

In its NT usage, εἰρήνη *eirēnē* generally seems to import the threefold predominant nuances of שָׁלוֹם *shalom*, the main word for peace in the OT. As used there, שָׁלוֹם *shalom* denotes a state of being—the idea of wellbeing (Lev 26:6)—the state of goodness in all its conceivable senses (cf. Lev 26:3-13); an attitude, e.g., of right standing with God expressed in deliberate resolve for harmonious living (Cf. Isa 48:18; 54:13) in such ways as loving God’s law (Psalm 119:165), “doing good” (Psalm 34:14), etc.; and a relationship, e.g., friendly relationships, both between states (1 Kgs. 5:26) and between individuals (Zech. 6:13).

Many occurrences of εἰρήνη *eirēnē* in the NT bear these theological semblances of שָׁלוֹם *shalom*. For example, εἰρήνη is used to express good relationship in the makarism, “Congratulations to those who create good relationships [εἰρήνη *eirēnē*] between people in conflict” (Mat 5:9; cf. Mk 9:50; Lk 2:14; 14:32; Acts 7:26; Rom 12:18; 1 Cor 7:15). Peace is also used in the sense of a state of safety (Lk 11:21) and of being undisturbed by external forces (Acts 9:31). εἰρήνη *eirēnē*

also denotes the **attitude** of choosing to live in harmony with one's neighbours (Mk 9:50), the attitude of seeking peace (Lk 14:32; Acts 12:20) and the attitude of conducting oneself peacefully (Rom 3:17), among others.

By the above survey the basic sense of εἰρήνη *eirēnē* in the NT is not the narrower one of absence of disturbance found in Greek circles, but the wider one of **wellbeing**—as in **שָׁלוֹם**. It means wellbeing in the sense of good health (Mk 5:34; Also Lk 7:50; 8:48); tranquillity (Lk 1:79; also Lk 19:42; Jn 14:27; Jn 16:33; Acts 9:31); and quietness or orderliness (1 Cor 14:33). That is “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.” Thus, in the NT usage of εἰρήνη we ultimately have the idea of the *state of wellbeing in the sense of a tranquil and contented heart—an inner “calm” or “peace of mind”*—of a person that is not being disturbed by anything, whether from within the soul or from external factors like ill health, conflicts or wars, or even lack of any conceivable thing. This is the semantic meaning of the concept of “peace of God” in this discourse.

The Peace of God in Paul's Teaching (PHIL 4:6-7)

The Context of Philippians 4:6-7

The statement, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7) is part of Paul's concluding exhortations to the Philippians. The exhortations begin at 4:4 where Paul again reminds the Philippians to “rejoice in the Lord”. Paul is writing to intimate them of the state of affairs in his Roman jail (1:12-30) and in doing this, to exhort them to unite and resist enemies of the cross of Christ who were disturbing them (1:27-2:14; 3:18). Paul tells them that, on his part, he is full of joy (Phil 1:4, 18) despite his imprisonment because his condition has “really served to advance the gospel” (Phil 1:12-14). In the same vein, he says, the Philippians should not be weighed down by the opposition they are experiencing (1:28); rather, they should trust God and joyfully resist the enemy by “working out” (κατεργάζεσθε 2:12) their salvation and share their joy with him (2:18). Paul is giving the Philippians a pattern of behaviour—an attitude (3:17)—that leads to peace of mind, namely trusting God and in that contentment joyfully “fighting together” (συναθλοντες 2:27) in the circumstances they find themselves. He refers to joy seven times and rejoicing six times in this short letter. For such lifestyle to succeed Paul exhorts his friends to stop worrying about anything but instead, pray about everything, tell God what they need, and joyfully thank God for all he has been doing for them (4:6-7).

**Exegesis of Philippians 4:6-7**

In 4:6-7 Paul launches into the focal exhortation to experience the peace of God: *μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε, ἀλλ' ἐν παντί τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ δαίσει μετὰ εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθαι πρὸς τὸν θεόν. καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἣ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.* “Do not continue to worry about anything; Instead, by (through the agency of) thanking, praying to, and earnestly pleading with God; Present your needs to God and his peace, which transcends all [human] understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (4:6-7).

μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε is a negative command. “Do not continue to worry about anything”—*μηδὲν* is a neuter singular negative of the numeral one, used as an adjective with a noun to describe a thing with the sense of “not one thing” or “nothing.” *μεριμνᾶτε* is second person plural, present active imperative of the verb *μεριμνάω* whose core idea is “concern”—the idea of caring feelings—“worry, compassion, sympathy, or regard for somebody or something.” But such concern can easily turn negative when it transits to obsession about the thing in thought. Thus, *μεριμνάω* has two senses: positively it denotes a beneficial feeling of unease and so care for or concern about something or someone (cf. 1 Cor 7:32; 12:25). Paul uses it in this sense in reference to genuine, positive concern which Timothy had about (the wellbeing of) the Philippians (Phil 2:20). Negatively, it has the sense of being overly anxious or overly concerned about something, the idea of worrying. Here in Philippians 4:6 Paul uses *μεριμνάω* to express worry; the negative sense of “‘anxious harassing care’ ..., attempting ‘to carry the burden of the future oneself’ ..., or ‘unreasonable anxiety’ ..., especially about things over which one has no control”

Negative commands in Greek are especially used to stop action in progress. *μεριμνᾶτε* therefore denotes stoppage of what the Philippians are habitually doing. Paul's use of the “negative *μη(δὲν)* with the present imperative, *μεριμνᾶτε*” presupposes that the Philippians were entangled in unwholesome anxiety, probably about such things as Paul mentions in this letter: his own condition in prison (Phil 1:29), the menace of the Philippians' opponents (1:28-30), Epaphroditus' health condition (2:25-28), trouble from a group of Judaizing Christians (3:2-4), and enemies of the cross of Christ (3:18-19). If so, Paul is exhorting them to stop worrying—to exit their emotional and psychological concerns. From another perspective, the present tense in Greek denotes the aspect of action in progress, hence, *μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε* “worry about nothing” means “Do not continue to worry about anything.” It is a call for

Philippians to avoid the unwholesome attitude of trying to work out their own salvation by themselves, but to instead, trust God who has been providing for them and will assuredly continue to empower them in their collective resistance of the enemies of the cross of Christ.

ἀλλ' ἐν παντί "Instead, in everything." ἐν παντί is neuter singular and refers to every single, individual situation. Thus, it means in "every" thing rather than in "all" things as is rendered in the New Jerusalem Bible. It means that Paul emphatically precludes the possibility of allowing certain situations to disturb the believers' emotional and mental categories. Being overly anxious is tantamount to setting oneself up for destruction. So, Paul exhorts the Philippians that the best thing to do whenever they find themselves in "any" unfavourable challenging situation, is to call God to take control of it while they play their role. Hence, Paul urges them:

τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ δεήσει μετὰ εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν "by (using the instrument of) prayer, earnest pleading, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God." προσευχῇ "prayer", δεήσει "earnest pleading", and αἰτήματα "requests" are basically synonymous as Moisés Silva also notes. Each of them is used in both the LXX and the NT with the shared meanings of prayer or entreaty. Thus, they are most probably strung together in this manner for emphasis. They complement one another and therefore strengthen Paul's hearty urge for the Philippians to imbibe the attitude of submitting to God in whatever specific circumstances, pleasant or unpleasant, that befall them. εὐχαριστία "thanksgiving" is their catalyst—in two ways. First, thanksgiving draws God's attention to the person praying (cf. Lk 17:15-19). Second, when one gives thanks to God ahead of the anticipated solution, he displays trust in God's predisposition to answer his prayer. This relieves him of negative anxiety. Paul is here probably giving practical advice based on his personal experiences, like his imprisonment with Silas in Philippi during his early ministry there (Acts 16:16-26). Rainy puts it so well: from his experiences Paul came to understand that "the way to be anxious about nothing was to be prayerful about everything."

In Paul's reasoning, making prayer "the alternative to anxiety" gives the believer peace of mind and of the heart even amid multiple challenges. This result is signalled by the copulative, καὶ, introducing the statement: καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν φρουρήσεται τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ "Then, the peace of God, which surpasses every mind, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ “the peace of God” can be understood in two senses. It can mean the state of the peace that characterizes God, which led Gideon to declare: “Yahweh is Peace” (Judg 6:24) – meaning God who is at peace and acts peacefully – the idea of “the God of peace”. It can also mean the peace God possesses and gifts to persons (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; Col 1:2). For Paul, it also means the harmony and good order of God that also characterise an individual or a people who relish the presence of God. Silva describes it as the relief of anxiety “grounded in the assurance that God knows our needs (Matt. 6:32; Luke 12:30).” According to O'Brien, the “expression is parallel to ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Col 3:15; cf. Jn. 14:27], which designates the peace that Christ both embodies and brings.” This is significant because elsewhere Paul identifies Jesus, the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6) as “our peace” (Eph. 2:14) as Gideon did the Lord, God (Judg 6:24). Such identification indicates Paul's perpetual understanding of God/Christ as the source of peace, the serenity in which God lives, as the source of man's peace. The believer attains such serenity when he becomes contented in a given situation because of the assurance that God knows and is controlling his situation and, relieved of anxiety, goes out in all boldness to confront his challenge. In the present context therefore, ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ is better understood as denoting both senses: 1) the peace that God possesses in his nature and gifts to people 2) as God who is by his nature at peace—since God is never plagued with anxieties, because he knows and controls the end from the beginning (Isa 46:10).

ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν “which rises above every mind” in the sense of transcending all human understanding. Hawthorne and Martin domesticate this clause within human endeavours and render it: “which excels all human planning”, meaning that “God’s peace is able to produce exceedingly better results than human planning ... it is more effective for removing anxiety than any intellectual effort or power of reasoning.” Silva emphatically corroborates this position: “God’s peace transcends our intellectual powers precisely because believers experience it when it is unexpected, in circumstances that make it appear impossible.” This position emphasises the effect of the peace of God which is described as ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν in seeing it as surpassing human effort at finding peace. But it has left out the content of that peace and so has overlooked an important aspect of Paul’s expression.

From its context, the challenges that threw the Philippians into anxiety included persecution of the church by the enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil 3:18) and it is quite possible that the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2) threatened the division of the church as members were likely to take sides. Those whom Paul calls “dogs” and

the false circumcision" (3:2) were therefore probably promising the church peace. In that case, Paul is alerting the Philippians to the deficient nature of that man-made peace to be sure; but this is precisely because even its conception (content wise) reductively focuses the absence of war or conflict to the exclusion of the mental and emotional serenity that characterise the believer in God even amid serious disorder and underlies and undergirds harmonious human relationships. In keeping with the stance of this discourse, peace in the NT generally is coloured by *shalom's* idea of wholeness of the inner person which is ultimately reflected in social relationships. *The peace of God/Christ that comes to man is not the absence of chaos but the presence of calm in the midst of chaos.* Jesus Messiah himself forewarned his followers: "In the world you will have tribulation." However, he exhorted them, "But take courage; I have overcome the world!" (Jn 16:33). This peace is thus demonstrated by the believer's joy in the name of Jesus Messiah which assures him of victory over his challenge and this is what makes it above human understanding.

φρουρουσειτε καρδας ὑμῶν καὶ τὸ νοῦν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ "will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." From Thucydides down φρουρῶ was used with the sense of to "protect by a military guard" and is used here with the same meaning. In the NT καρδῶα "heart" is imbued with the idea of "inner self", denoting "the seat and centre of all physical life" (James 5:5; Acts 14:17) and as the centre and seat of spiritual life—the innermost self—referencing the soul or mind with its functions, to wit: emotional (Acts 2:26), volitional (Acts 9:7), and rational (Acts 7:23). In this light, J. A. Motyer explains the expression, "hearts and minds" as source and outflow respectively. The heart is the physical centre of the person which supports the outer life, while the *mind* flows from this centre as the thought category and from it flow definite plans, imaginations and so forth." It should be observed though, as even Motyer does, that since the Bible associates to the heart functions that would ordinarily be identified with mind, will, emotions and conscience, the *heart* is synonymous in meaning with 'mind' in the phrase "hearts and minds". When Paul promises that the peace of God that is beyond human understanding φρουρουσειτε καρδας ὑμῶν καὶ τὸ νοῦν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ "will guard your hearts and your thoughts" therefore, he means that it will form a garrison, like the Roman garrison in Philippi, around the whole personality of the Philippian believer—body and soul, not just the emotional and mental categories.

The phrase, ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ "in Christ Jesus" locates the source of the Philippians' garrison. Paul knew Jesus Messiah as "our peace" (Eph.



2:14) and therefore the mediator of the peace he embodies. It is through faith in Christ's redemptive work and by submitting to his will that one can have peace with God (Rom 5:1) and the peace of God will stand guard for him against any foreign invaders like anxiety, worry, or fear to prevent him from disturbance so the believer can remain calm and focused as he faces his challenging situation. The peace that Christ brought is primarily spiritual peace from and with God; it is peace in the heart, peace as one's disposition or spirit.

Exposition of Philippians 4:6-7

In the same manner as the word, peace, the concept "Peace of God" evokes various nuances. To those with the knowledge of Church History, the mention of "peace of God" conjures images of the church movement that emerged in southern France in the 10th century AD to protect the Church's property and its vulnerable members from violence when constituted secular authorities failed to maintain order. The Movement started during a church council at Le Puy (975 AD) and was repeated during several subsequent councils, including those of Charroux (c. 989 and c. 1028), Narbonne (990), Limoges (994 and 1031), Poitiers (c. 1000), and Bourges (1038).² During these councils, ecclesiastical authorities, supported by regional lay leaders, sensitised the masses that evoked God's power to protect his people and their lands and waged holy war to resist aristocratic violence on the Church. By the late 11th and the 12th centuries this Movement of sacred militancy spread to southern Italy and Sicily.

For our purposes however, "the peace of God" denotes not the movement of sacred militancy, but God's gift to humanity which is congruent with his character of unity (MK 12:32; Gal 3:20), truthfulness (Jn 3:33), faithfulness (1 Cor 10:13), orderliness (1 Cor 14:33), justice (2 Thes 1:6), light (1 Jn 1:5), and love (1 Jn 4:8, 16) as the foundations of peace. Content-wise, the peace of God is an inward calm that controls one's emotional and mental responses to external and internal disturbances—"the presence of calm in the midst of chaos."³ When Paul describes it as "the peace of God" which transcends all understanding" (Phi 4:7), he means a state of tranquillity or quiet rest of one—body and soul—that surpasses human imagination, influence, and ability. It gives one freedom from mental or spiritual disturbance, confusion or conflict, a feeling of contentment, of not worrying at all, the idea of serenity. Ultimately then, the peace of God means trusting God to give us victory in every challenging situation. Thus, when one has the peace of God one feels contented and calm, and has no emotional conflicts within oneself

as one faces any situation or with other people. This type of peace dictates harmony in groups too. When there is the peace of God among a group of people, they live and work together in a friendly relationship and do not cause any trouble for the community.

The Gospel of John states that this peace of God/Christ differs both in essence and in content from the type of peace found in the world (Jn 16: 33). The difference is in the fact that whereas the peace sought by people of the world only negatively alerts someone of the absence of external disturbances, the peace of God essentially positively assures one of wholeness; both in essence and in content. As exemplified by classical Greek's use of *eirēnē*, the Greco-Roman world conceived of peace as an external tranquillity—the absence of disturbance by wars or conflicts—but excluded the more important inner calm of man's spirit. In contrast, the peace of God instils in members of the community a joyful enthusiasm to forgive, heal wounds, and reconcile with one another when challenged by situations. This is the signature of the wholeness that characterises the Messianic Kingdom of God.

Jesus Messiah demonstrated the above stated dissimilarity when contrasting the ideology of benefactors in the Roman imperial system of his day, who lorded it over their subjects under the guise of *Pax Romana*, to leadership in the government of God (Mat 20:25). That is where Roman rulers coerced captured people into accepting a state of numbness and called it peace. This annuls the claim of Irenaeus that, "The Romans have given the world peace, and we travel without fear along the roads and across the sea wherever we will." To be sure, the relative peace that Gaius Octavian (Augustus Caesar), ordered and purportedly achieved was nothing more than harmony in social interrelationship among all the conquered peoples. Cassidy describes it as an imposed peace achieved by military campaigns or the threat of such campaigns. It was "a victory-peace for the Romans," but "a peace of subjection" for conquered peoples who were simply observing an uneasy calm that was maintained by 25 legions across the empire (Tacitus *Annals* 4.5). Thus, apart from Jesus Messiah, the peace was criticised even by the Roman nobility. Tacitus wrote in *Annals* 1.10: "No doubt, there was peace after all this, but it was a peace stained with blood." For Plutarch, a Roman historian, it was Caesar's "insatiable love of power and a mad desire to be first and greatest" that birthed this dominating strategy to scare anyone who might nurse any idea of rebellion (Cf. Josephus, *BJ* V, 366f.; *BJ* II, 362; *BJ* VI, 341). Trajan says of the conquered peoples: "Our enemies are afraid, and crave permission to obey commands. ... They pray, they implore, we grant, we



refuse—both in accordance with the majesty of sovereign power.”⁴ These views corroborate Jesus’ assessment that Roman peace was not peace after all, compared to the peace God gives as explained above. In twenty-first-century Nigeria several factors have left us with an even worse scenario.

Some Factors Militating Against The Peace Of God In Nigeria

In the course of researching on the topic of this discourse, I discovered that a number of largely human factors are militating against the experience of the peace of God in Nigeria. It is pertinent to observe that in God’s dealings with the Israelites, even as an elect nation, whenever they abandoned the will of God for them, God too withheld his peace from them. This suggests that the primary cause of absence of peace in Nigeria today is likely connected with Nigerians’ rebellion against the will of God. There is too much ungodliness in the land.

The first expression of that rebellion is the craving for land ownership. Land is an inheritance bequeathed to a people by God, the estate owner (Lev 25:23; Num 36:7; 1 Kings 21:3; Ezk 46:18). But, in recent times the Fulani have been making the loud claim in various quarters that they are the owners of all the land in Nigeria.⁵ This has birthed a web of conflicts with various ethnicities that see the lands they occupy as divinely endowed inheritance that they cannot callously part with. This Fulani herders’ land grabbing is by far the most devastating of all the factors disturbing the country’s peace in recent times. In the Middle Belt alone, it consumed more than 2995 human lives from 2014 to 2018⁶ and has continued in that manner across the nation. The Fulani herders and crop farmers’ conflict is ideologically intertwined with Boko Haram’s ideology. As we reasoned elsewhere,⁷ Boko Haram’s violence in Nigeria has ideological roots in Usman Dan Fodio’s jihad of 1804-1808. Like Dan Fodio, the sect wants to replace the Federal Republic of Nigeria with an Islamic theocratic empire;⁸ “a system based on the application of Islamic law (*shari’a*), and headed by a religious leadership.”⁹ Christians’ fear of Islamic neo-colonisation then has sparked the resistance that has expelled both internal peace (of the mind and heart) and external (public, relational) peace from Nigeria.

From the perspective of Boko Haram, their “alienation from the wealthier, Christian, oil-producing, southern Nigeria, pervasive poverty, rampant government corruption, heavy-handed security measures, and the belief that relations with the West are a corrupting influence”¹⁰ are the factors fuelling their desire to make Nigeria an Islamic State so as to right the wrongs.¹¹ Paradoxically though, this has dispelled peace in Nigeria.

The hate-group's grievances, well sold through their propaganda language authority, initially compelled some local Muslim population to empathise with the group's violence and made recruitment into the sect quite easy."

It may sound ironical, even paradoxical, but one has to state that the pervasiveness of religion (θρησκεία "external or ceremonial fear of deities" or δεισιδαιμονία "superstition") in Nigeria is another primary hindrance to experiencing the peace of God in the country. Religion is both a complex and dynamic phenomenon. Its dynamism allows it to develop and or accommodate various elements, some local, others universal. The most salient elements of religion are form, structure, and function. Formally – Religion can appear as animism, polytheism, monotheism, moralism, secularism etc. All these forms reject the radical claims of revelation that God can only be known if, and when he chooses to, and does reveal himself to humans." The heart of almost all religions is man's endeavour to discover (and be able to *manipulate*) a supreme power. Structurally – Religion builds on the foundation of such elements as manipulation, divination, magic, *realpolitik* and *vox populi* etc. Without these, religion cannot stand. Functionally – All religions aim at explaining the world and defining man's position in it. To this end, religion utilizes every available means—political, economic, social etc.—to bring people together, in most cases as structures that could be manipulated, to enhance the religionist's place in his environment, or at least to keep pace with it. This humanistic focus of religion therefore largely explains why its pervasiveness in Nigeria and the world promotes violent conflicts rather than the peace of God. Most terrorist groups in Nigeria are Islamist in orientation and have the same overarching goal to Islamise Nigeria, whatever it takes. This has excited similar reactionary groups within Christianity which has also been largely religionised." A religious person however can hardly see, comprehend, and so imbibe and utilize the peace of God largely because of its divine instead of humanistic focus.

Closely related to the factor of religion is that of the attitude of apathy exhibited by many who should have stood up to enthrone and defend peace in their communities or societies. Many Christians exhibit such apathy out of frustration stemming from the weakening position of the Church due to Nigerian government's antichristian policies influenced by Muslim rulers with religious Christians in government as spectators. Since the Fulani smuggled *shari'a* into the Nigerian constitution and also changed many national policies to favour Islam against Christianity, the Church has continually had heart-throbbing



experiences. Many godly Christians' desire today is to destroy those whom they hold as enemies and clear the way for Christianity to thrive. Inability to realise this dream has led many Christians to allow the antichristian actions to zombify them and are behaving as if they are exiles in their fatherland instead of working out the peace of God for the nation. Yahweh's directive was for even his exiled people to fully participate in civic life in Babylon and to *"seek the welfare [shalom] of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare [shalom] you will find your welfare [shalom]"* (Jer 29:1-7). Christians therefore, do not have to allow anxiety make them abdicate this responsibility, but to strive to work out their salvation for the peace of God to reign.

One last issue to note as militating against sustainable peace in Nigeria is some people's illusion that they can create peace in conflict situations. An example is when parties in a conflict insist on getting "just peace"—that is, on justifying the peace being sought; the idea of having their perceived enemies penalised during the process of conflict resolution, to satisfy their grievances as the solution to ending their conflict. This stifles the peace process because the notion of "just peace" is an oxymoron." To be sure, "Justice without peace rarely is possible, because peace provides the conditions in which law and order can be restored and all forms of justice considered." Oftentimes though, purported perceptions of injustice are, in fact, not substantiated." So, what one needs in the search for peace in a conflict situation is for both parties to be fairly treated in all the stages of the peace process. Justice is to be addressed during peacebuilding as the final stage of the conflict's management.

Appropriating The Peace Of God For Societal Change In Nigeria

The last question to be answered in this discourse is how Nigerians can appropriate the peace of God for a better society. Basal to our discussion is the question, what does the peace of God mean in the context of the politically motivated but religiously veiled conflicts of Nigeria? Looking at the matter from the perspective of Jesus' teaching, ethical reasoning, and theological reflection, what is Paul saying to the Philippians and what should be a Christian's ethic of violence in his daily personal, family, and social life? In other words, how are Christians to "experience"—"practice"—the peace of God in the face of social challenges to their individual peace (emotional and mental state) and relational harmony?

For the purpose of this discourse the question will be approached

from practical life issues. Take as example the question of how a Christian should respond to challenges like when a bandit abducts him and is taking him to some unknown destination for unknown purposes. In view of the biblical teaching on the peace of God presented above, since humans are created responsible beings and the believer is exhorted to trust God as being in control of his life challenges, is he to just sit, fold his alms, pray, thanking God and await salvation from heaven even when by heavenly providence the bandit, for example, sleeps off and leaves his weapon in the easy reach of the believer? In other words, does the peace of God preclude human responsibility? Considering that Jesus Messiah, the embodiment of the peace of God, himself chased thieves out of the Jerusalem temple with a whip, what did he mean when he told his disciples, "But now ... if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one" (Lk 22:36)?

This question of how to experience the peace of God is difficult enough; there are so many views to it, depending on one's position in the pacifists' theology debate. Two Christian traditions have shaped answers to questions of this kind since the earliest days of Christianity, namely pacifism and just war theories, and recently, pacificism. I lack time and space to engage in their deep analysis to decide the most morally acceptable position; but that is a well-trodden route. So, I will only point out that pacifists reject any violent move to either establish or restore peace in any given situation; even for self-defence. Pacifists argue that Jesus Messiah, the Prince of Peace and the embodiment of the peace of God, prohibited violent acts however motivated (Mat 5:21-25, 48-52; 26:51-53) and the post Easter and the patristic Church, following Jesus, even refused participating in any army or militia.* In practice though, this resolve is not consistently applied. Thus, Roman Catholics, during Vatican II, endorsed pacifism "in the form of conscientious objection to war" as stated in *Gaudium et Spes* 78-9. Like St. Augustin, Vatican II accepted war as a last resort saying: "governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defense once every means of peaceful settlement have [sic] been exhausted."~ This latter position is designated pacificism.

Christian advocates of just war on the other hand espouse the view that the peace of God ultimately means trusting God to give us victory in every challenging situation. Trust in God however has to go with human responsibility. Thus, complementary to trusting God, peace can in extreme circumstances be established through violent acts as a last resort declared by constituted authority and only to maintain or restore peace.* This position is usually backed by some NT texts, namely Matthew 8:5-10; 10:34-39, Mark 12:13-17, Luke 22:35-38, Luke 22:49-53, John



2:13-16, John 15:12-17. Augustine of Hippo led in this view while discussing peace in his *City of God* (Book IV, especially chapter 15 and Book XIX, chapter 13), by positing that for good men warfare is not a matter of felicity as it is for bad men, but a necessity to bring unjust men to justice and peace. However, he gives this responsibility to "proper authorities, not to their Christian subjects" – William Michael Slattery.

Jesus the Warrior? Historical Christian Perspectives and Problems on the

as Vatican II later adopted.

In my view, all these questions reduce to one: how can one be alive to human responsibility while trusting God to control their life challenges? For Paul, this is done by "striving" to "workout" one's salvation believing God to be in charge of the believer's circumstances. This is the meaning of experiencing or practicing the peace of God. It is a proactive approach to maintaining or restoring internal and external peace against prospective or accrual challenges which though, can be fully understood only with careful ethical and theological consideration.

According to the Gospels Jesus Messiah came to re-establish the kingdom of God (Mat 19:27)—to revert humanity to doing the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven (Mat 6:9-10). The ultimate goal was the wellbeing of kingdom citizens (Mat 6:33; Jn 14:27; 16:33; Lk 4:18-22). The kingdom restoration programme is warfare. In its first phase Jesus Messiah, playing infrapolitics, dissuaded his nascent kingdom community, the *ekklesia*, from the use of human arms to avoid clamp down by the Roman military. Instead, he encouraged civil disobedience. When he directed his followers, "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two" (Matthew 5:41), he was actually telling them to expose any Roman soldier that abused them to the authorities who had legislated that a soldier should compel a civilian to help him with his luggage for only one mile, for possible penalty for the soldier. But, Jesus Messiah well knew that the kingdom movement was soon to become a force to reckon with. He knew also that the battle for survival would be a continuous one and his combatants would need arms. Thus, he told his followers on the night of his arrest to "now" bear arms (Lk 22:36).

During its first phase the war was primarily spiritual and was being fought by Jesus Messiah himself with only the shadow of its effects casting a halo over his followers. His followers' role was then to understudy its principles as the trainee leaders of the kingdom were sent on practical training with the kingdom gospel (Mat 10:13; Lk 10:5). The second phase of the kingdom restoration war is however being fought by

the church militant against rebels in the messianic kingdom—those who destroy the earth (Rev 11:18). Though still spiritual, the war now has more physical expressions as is seen in the defensive involvement of the saints in the divine judgement wars evident in the activity of the white horse rider (Rev 6:1-2).“.

According to Jesus Messiah’s kingdom restoration plan, the use of arms was reserved for the second phase of the restoration. That is why he charged his trainee combatants to carry arms “now” (Lk 22:36), few hours before he was arrested and when he was satisfied with their prowess at the use of the arms as they demonstrated it during his arrest (Lk 22:49-51), he told them, ἵτεωστο {του, literally “permit until this”, meaning “Do [only] as much as this” [so that you don’t expose yourself]” (v 51). It is an expression of approval in the context of politics of disguise. Paul was writing to the Philippians from the backdrop of this warfare motif as he warned the Ephesians about it (Eph 6:11-17). He knew that human acts like persecutions being perpetrated on the Philippians were likely to weigh them down and exhorted them to stop worrying, but let God know about their challenges and fight on. The exhortation does not request them to fold their arms and sit, but to strive towards the battle, *believing that the presence of God with them assured them of victory in their situation*. Such is the state of undisturbed mind which keeps a person at peace even amid grave challenges. The peace of God thus means fighting through challenges, trusting God for victory.

Such peace of God has eluded Nigeria largely because of worldly-induced rivalry between Islam and religionised Christianity. And this is due to ignorance that both religions are two expressions of the one Abrahamic counterculture with a common enemy: Satan (Qur’an an Nisah 4:163-165; 42:13). The Qur’an specifically calls all adherents of both expressions of the counterculture as Muslims; believers in one God (Ali ‘Imran 3:22, cf. al-An’ am6:163; al-A’raf7:143). In John 3:16 God announces his ‘love gift’, Jesus Messiah, to humanity and requires people to believe in the saving effect of that gift and get his peace. But that peace can be appropriated by Nigerians only when the barrier of ignorance that Christianity and Islam are sister expressions of the same society is removed and Muslims and Christians unite as members of one brotherhood and fight Satan who is using variety of means to cause discord and destroy the brotherhood. To this end, the Church, which is led by the Holy Spirit and so discerns the purpose of God in “the needs, and the longings of humanity”-has the bigger responsibility to lead the rest of the world, including Muslims from institutional Islam, to receive that salvation God offers through Christ. This calls for aggressive evangelism



among Muslims and active, indeed, proactive participation in the political process in reverse of the present tendency of Christians to abdicate that responsibility, thus inviting the wrath of God (Mat 10:33; 2 Tim 2:12).

Conclusion

This discourse reveals that peace has been displaced from Nigeria by the emergence of a network of terrorist groups that, by their shared characteristics, can be said to be of the same family: Islamist. They have a politically-motivated but religiously-veiled agenda. Evidence emerged during the study that they are collaborating to destabilise the country, weaken government and other forces, and take over Nigeria and make it an Islamic State. This has instilled the fear of colonisation in other Nigerians and has expelled both internal and relational peace. At least, 104 different groups have been registered with the authorities as peacebuilding bodies and are working assiduously to help restore peace to the country. So far, these bodies have failed in their goal since they are focusing only relational peace, and the terror groups continue to increase in numbers and sophistication. Thus, these failures are orchestrated by failure to tow the way of the peace of God. God is peace and the author of peace. It is his prerogative to give peace to whom he wills. The God of Peace has extended his peace, Jesus Messiah who embodies that peace, to the world, but a large segment of Nigerians has not received that peace because of religious rivalry, informed by ignorance of their identity. This discourse therefore calls on the Christian community in Nigeria to rise up to its divinely assigned responsibility to communicate the peace of God to all and sundry. God's peace is by nature the harmony and good order of God that he gifts to humans as the relief of anxiety "grounded in the assurance that God knows, is capable, and willing to control our challenges. God's peace is experiential and appropriated by first making peace with the God of peace through faith in Jesus Messiah. Nigerians need to know this peace and the way to getting it as Paul explains it, imbibe it, and utilise it to be able to live a harmonious and profitable brotherhood.

Endnotes

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 - 10 Boko Haram resurrects, declares total Jihad. *Vanguard*, August 14, 2009.
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- 27 Rainy, cited by Gerald w. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*.
- 28 Gerald w. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*.
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Salisu Ahmadu, the president of Fulani Nationality Movement (F U N A M), in PM News on <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2020/02/02/trouble-in-nigeria-fulani-group-claims-ownership-of-land-from-sokoto-to-the-atlantic/>. Bello Abdullahi Bodejo insisted again that the Fulani own all lands in Nigeria when reacting to a seven-day ultimatum by the Ondo State Governor for Fulani to vacate Ondo forests. To confirm that Fulani indeed are making such claims, the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Mohammad Sa'ad Abubakar III came out to debunk the claim, pointing out that as the leader of Usman Dan Fodio dynasty, he has never seen where in the jihadist's hundred books "Usman Dan Fodio said Nigeria belongs to Fulani ... that fake write-up was by those who don't want peace in this country and we had denounced that" (*The Guardian* 8 Feb 2020), <https://guardian.ng/news/sultan>.

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- 63 The variety of visionary prophetic features used in depicting the white horse rider in Rev 6:1-2, viewed against historical and theological elements in their portrayal indicate that the rider here is a commissioned human officer whereas the one in Rev 19:11, 19 and 21 is Jesus Messiah himself.
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