OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD: NONVIOLENCE AS A NEW TESTAMENT MODEL FOR PEACEBUILDING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Nigeria faces significant challenges related to violence, conflict, and social unrest, often stemming from ethnic, religious, and political differences. The escalation of violence and its consequences pose severe threats to the stability, development, and overall well-being of the nation. Traditional approaches to conflict resolution and peace-building have often been inadequate in addressing these deep-rooted issues. In light of these challenges, there is a need to explore alternative models of peace-building that are rooted in nonviolence and draw inspiration from the principles outlined in the New Testament. This article adopted a theological method in this research. The study examines the theoretical foundations of nonviolence as espoused in the New Testament scriptures and analyzes its relevance to contemporary peace-building efforts. By delving into the principles of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation advocated in the New Testament, the paper presents a compelling argument for the adoption of nonviolence as a practical and ethical framework for peace-building in Nigeria. In conclusion, this paper asserts that embracing the New Testament model of nonviolence can significantly contribute to transforming the culture of violence in Nigeria and beyond Africa. The findings of this research provide valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars working in the field of peace-building, offering a roadmap for cultivating enduring peace in regions afflicted by conflict and violence.
Keywords: Nonviolence, Peace-building, Model, Overcoming Evil with Good

Introduction
Nigeria's history is marred by episodes of violence, ranging from inter-ethnic clashes to religious tensions and insurgencies. The nation has grappled with issues such as communal conflicts, terrorism, and ethno-religious violence, all of which have posed significant challenges to its social fabric and economic development. Traditional peace-building methods have often proven insufficient, necessitating a fresh perspective grounded in timeless ethical principles.

Peace building is a critical endeavour in many regions of the world, particularly in Africa, which has faced numerous conflicts and violence over the years. Nigeria has experienced a long history of conflict, from colonial struggles to post-independence conflicts, ethnic strife, and civil wars. Many peace-building efforts have been made, often employing conventional approaches that have not always yielded lasting results (Sharp 65). The recurring waves of violence in Nigeria underscore the urgent need for a transformative approach to peace-building.

The study aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and applying New Testament nonviolent teachings to foster peace and reconciliation in Nigeria, addressing both immediate conflicts and underlying structural issues. This study aims to explore the concept of nonviolence as a model of peace-building in Nigeria, drawing inspiration from the principles found in the New Testament. It delves into the potential of nonviolent strategies to address and overcome the multifaceted challenges of conflict, injustice, and violence in Nigeria. Addressing

these is crucial for advancing our understanding of how nonviolence, as a New Testament model of peace-building, can be effectively applied in Nigeria context. By doing so, we can contribute to the development of innovative and biblical sensitive approaches to peace-building that promote lasting peace, reconciliation, and social justice in Nigeria. Examining nonviolence through the lens of the New Testament offers a fresh perspective on addressing these challenges.

Conceptual Clarifications of Terms
Nonviolence: The term, "nonviolence," according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is the practice of refusing to respond to anything with violence; it is also the avoidance or abstention from violence as a matter of principle (1). A situation in which someone avoids fighting or using physical force, especially when trying to make political change. When you protest peacefully or work for social changes without resorting to violence, that's nonviolence. The goal of nonviolence is to promote justice, equality, and social harmony while respecting the dignity and humanity of all individuals.

Peace-building: Peace-building refers to the process of establishing sustainable peace and addressing the root causes of conflict in post-conflict societies. It involves a range of activities, strategies, and measures designed to strengthen and solidify peace in order to prevent the recurrence of violence. Peace-building efforts aim to promote social cohesion, economic development, good governance, and respect for human rights. This multidimensional approach is essential for creating a stable environment where people can live peacefully and prosper (Smith 321). The goal is to foster an atmosphere of trust and cooperation, enabling communities to move away from a history of violence and build a foundation for lasting peace.

Model: A model can also be a person or thing regarded as an excellent example of a particular quality. For instance, a role model is someone who serves as an example to others, especially in terms of behaviour or achievements (All Nation Dictionary 437).

Overcoming Evil with Good: One of the most well-known references to this principle is found in the New Testament, especially, in the book of Romans 12:21 (NIV). "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." This verse encourages individuals to resist the temptation to retaliate against evil or wrongdoing and instead respond with goodness and positive actions. The idea is that responding to hatred or injustice with love, forgiveness, and kindness can ultimately lead to positive change and transformation.

Overview of Violence in Nigeria History
Nigeria, a country located in West Africa, has a complex history marked by various forms of violence. From pre-colonial conflicts to post-independence struggles, Nigeria has experienced ethnic, religious, and political violence. The roots of this violence are complex, involving ethnic, religious, political, and economic dimensions that have evolved over centuries. Before the arrival of European colonial powers in the late 19th century, Nigeria was made up of several powerful kingdoms and empires, the Hausa-Fulani states in the North, the Yoruba kingdoms in the southwest, and the Igbo societies in the southeast. These kingdoms were often in competition with one another and engaged in warfare to expand their territories or protect their interests (Dafer 43). Trade also played a significant role in pre-colonial Nigeria, with different regions specializing in various goods and commodities. The control of trade routes and access to valuable resources often led to conflicts between neighbouring communities and kingdoms. Additionally, there were social and cultural differences among the various ethnic groups, which sometimes escalated into conflicts. Religious differences, such as those between followers of indigenous African religions and those who later embraced Islam or Christianity, also

contributed to tensions and conflicts in pre-colonial Nigeria.

In 1960, Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960. However, the country faced significant challenges in integrating its diverse population. Ethnic and regional tensions between groups like the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa-Fulani escalated, culminating in the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) when the south eastern region attempted to secede as the Republic of Biafra. This war, according to Heerten and Moses, resulted in a massive loss of life and had lasting social and political impacts (169).

Another common kind of violent conflict that has intensified over time in Nigeria is religious violence. Religious identities are usually classified into three, Christian, Muslim, and African Traditional Religion (ATR). It is however, Christianity and Islam that are politically explosive when it comes to crisis in Nigeria, partly because of their susceptibility to formal and social structures and tendencies to spill over from their initial theatres into other localities, states, or even regions of federation, Ethno-religious clashes have proven to be the most violent instance of inter-group crisis in Nigeria (Dafer 79).

Nigeria has experienced numerous religious conflicts, primarily between Muslims in the north and Christians in the south. These conflicts have resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and displacement of communities. Factors such as religious intolerance, political manipulation, land and socioeconomic disparities have contributed to these tensions.

Nigeria has faced periods of political unrest and military coups since gaining independence. Additionally, the Niger Delta region has been a hotspot for militancy due to grievances over oil revenue distribution and environmental degradation caused by oil exploration. According to Abdu et al, violent conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta has existed for almost 50 years. It is driven by the struggle among local communities, multinational oil companies, and the Nigerian state for control over oil revenues derived from this resource rich territory (20).

Unfortunately, violence has evolved over time in Nigeria from civil wars, military coups and the Niger Delta conflict to a new generation of threats. The Boko Haram insurgency is one of the most significant challenges in recent years, an extremist Islamist group founded in the early 2000s. This group has carried out numerous attacks, including bombings, kidnappings, and massacres, primarily in north-eastern Nigeria. The group's activities have resulted in the displacement of millions of people and a humanitarian crisis in the region. Iyekekpolo notes that diverse public location like markets, schools, religious worship places, motor parks, police stations, military barracks have been hit by suicide attacks linked to Boko Haram (1).

John ChiwuzulumOdozi and Ruth Uwaifo Oyelere asserted that, in the last 20 years another kind of conflict has emerged and is referred to by some as farmers-herdsmen conflict. The Fulanis are the herders, who want access to land for their cattle. Deaths arising from this kind of conflict are concentrated in the North central geopolitical zone, with highest intensity of conflicts in Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa and Plateau. This growing conflict has led to the death of a significant number of people (8). These clashes have resulted in significant casualties and displacement of communities. Efforts to address these issues have been ongoing, but finding lasting solutions requires addressing deep-rooted social, economic, and political challenges. It's important to note that this overview provides a broad perspective, and there are many more specific incidents and nuances within Nigeria's history of violence.

Contemporary Challenges to Peace-building in Nigeria

Nigeria faces a myriad of contemporary challenges in its pursuit of sustainable peace -building. The persistence of ethnic and religious conflicts, political instability, economic disparities, and the proliferation of armed groups significantly hamper peace efforts. Despite various initiatives by the government and international organizations, these issues remain deeply entrenched, necessitating a multi-faceted and inclusive approach to peace-building. The study discussed some of the key challenges to peace-building in Nigeria.

1.   **Ethnic and Religious Conflict:** The Human Right Watch (HRW) observes that, Nigeria is ethnically and religiously diverse, and tensions between different ethnic and religious groups have often resulted in violent conflicts. The ongoing clashes between farmers and herders, particularly in states like Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna, have claimed numerous lives and displaced communities (Human Rights Watch 2).

2.   **Boko Haram Insurgency:** According to Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Boko Haram terrorist group, based mainly in north-eastern Nigeria, has been responsible for numerous attacks, bombings, and kidnappings, causing widespread fear and displacement. The group's activities have affected not only Nigeria but also neighbouring countries like Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (10). The Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria has displaced over 3.3 million people, the highest in Africa (Dafer 98).

3.   **Corruption and Governance Issues:** Corruption within the Nigerian government and institutions remains a significant challenge, affecting the effective delivery of public services and eroding public trust. Weak governance structures have hindered efforts to address various social and economic issues, leading to dissatisfaction among the population (Agbiboa 23).

4.   **Economic Instability and Unemployment:** Nigeria faces economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth. Economic instability and lack of job opportunities have contributed to social unrest and, in some cases, involvement in criminal activities and violence (World Bank 15).

5.   **Denial of Basis Civic and Human Rights:** Closely related to poverty is the denial of basic and human rights, which push some people to carry arms in a bid to fight for their rights but subsequently are cajoled into religious crisis by their uncontrolled mind and sensory modalities. Human right denial is worldwide phenomenon. This is confirmed by the rate of genocide experienced in most countries of the world. In the early 1990s, for example, such atrocities rocked countries like South Africa, Somalia, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Rwanda (Dafer 93). The inequitable distribution of political and economic power in the Niger Delta is the root cause of the agitations and rise of militancy, seeking for increased revenue allocation to better the lives of their people, the Niger Delta region being the reservoir of funds feeding the entire country with its oil wealth.

Nonviolence in the New Testament as a viable Peace-building Model
Nonviolence is a central theme in the New Testament. It is primarily associated with the teachings and example of Jesus Christ and Early Christian communities, who emphasized love, forgiveness, and non-resistance to evil. Here are some key passages and concepts related to nonviolence in the New Testament. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus delivers some of his most famous teachings, including the Beatitudes and the command to love one's enemies. In Matthew 5:38-39 (NIV), he says, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."

Walter Wink, in his book "Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way," argues that Jesus' teachings in the New Testament present a radical approach to nonviolence. Wink highlights the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), particularly the instructions to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, and love one's enemies, as core elements of Jesus' nonviolent ethic. He interprets these actions not as passive submission but as active, nonviolent resistance that exposes the injustice of the oppressor (40).

John Howard Yoder, in "The Politics of Jesus," emphasizes that Jesus' life and teachings offer a political model grounded in nonviolence. Yoder argues that Jesus' refusal to resort to violence, even in the face of death, exemplifies a commitment to peace that should be emulated by Christian communities. He views the early church's practice of nonviolence as a continuation of Jesus' teachings and a practical approach to peace-building (120).

Glen Stassen, in "Just Peace-making: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace," integrates Jesus' teachings with practical strategies for peace-building. Stassen identifies ten practices that align with Jesus' nonviolent principles, such as conflict resolution, human rights advocacy, and promoting sustainable development. He argues that these practices are essential for creating a just and peaceful society (32)

Richard Hays, in "The Moral Vision of the New Testament," explores the ethical implications of New Testament teachings, including the call to nonviolence. Hays argues that the New Testament consistently advocates for nonviolent responses to conflict, citing passages like Romans 12:17-21 and 1 Peter 3:9. He suggests that the early Christian communities' adherence to nonviolence serves as a powerful model for contemporary peace-building efforts (121).

Stanley Hauerwas, in works such as "The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics," discusses the importance of nonviolence as a defining characteristic of Christian ethics. Hauerwas emphasizes that the church should be a community of peace, embodying the nonviolent teachings of Jesus. He argues that nonviolence is not only a moral imperative but also a practical means of witnessing to the world (211). These scholars collectively argue that the New Testament provides a robust framework for nonviolent action and peace-building, grounded in the life and teachings of Jesus. Their works explore how these principles can be applied in contemporary contexts to address conflict and promote justice.

The Relevance of New Testament Principles to Contemporary Peace-building
The New Testament contains a wealth of teachings and principles that can be relevant to contemporary peace-building efforts. While the New Testament primarily focuses on matters of faith and spirituality, its underlying values and messages can be applied to the pursuit of peace and reconciliation in today's world. Here are some ways in which New Testament principles can be relevant to contemporary peace-building.

Love and Forgiveness: The New Testament emphasizes the importance of love and forgiveness. In Matthew 5:44-45, Jesus teaches, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This principle encourages individuals and communities to overcome hatred and bitterness, essential components of conflict resolution and reconciliation (Wink 41).

Peace-making: In the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:9), Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." This verse highlights the value of actively working for peace and reconciliation, which is central to peace-building efforts (Ibid).

Justice and Mercy: The New Testament promotes the idea of balancing justice with mercy. Micah 6:8 encourages believers to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." Striking a balance between justice and forgiveness is crucial in resolving conflicts and promoting lasting peace.

Reconciliation: The New Testament underscores the importance of reconciliation among individuals and communities. In 2 Corinthians 5:18, the apostle Paul writes, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." This ministry of reconciliation can serve as a model for contemporary peace-building initiatives.

Community and Unity: The New Testament emphasizes the unity of believers in the body of Christ. In Ephesians 4:3, Paul urges believers to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Promoting unity and cooperation among diverse groups is vital in peace-building efforts.

Servant Leadership: Jesus's example of servant leadership, as seen in his washing of the disciples' feet (John 13), can inspire leaders to prioritize the well-being of their communities and work toward peace and reconciliation.

New Testament principles offer timeless wisdom that is highly relevant to contemporary peace-building. Love, forgiveness, nonviolence, justice, and community are essential components for resolving conflicts and fostering lasting peace. By integrating these principles, modern peace-building efforts can address the deep-seated issues that underlie conflicts and promote a more just and harmonious world.

Recommendations for Implementation of Nonviolence Model for Peace-building in Nigeria
Overcoming evil with good through nonviolence is a powerful and transformative approach to peace-building, inspired by the New Testament teachings. Applying this model in a context like Nigeria, which has faced various forms of violence and conflict, requires a strategic and holistic approach. Implementing these recommendations requires a collaborative effort involving government institutions, religious leaders, civil society organizations, and the wider community. By embracing the New Testament model of nonviolence, Nigeria can foster a culture of peace, understanding, and reconciliation, overcoming evil with good in the process.

Here are some recommendations on how to implement nonviolence as a New Testament model of peace-building in Nigeria.
1. Promote Interfaith Dialogue: Encourage dialogue among different religious communities in Nigeria. Create platforms where people from different faiths can come together to understand each other's perspectives, fostering mutual respect and tolerance.

2. Education and Awareness: Promote education about nonviolence, conflict resolution, and peace-building within local communities. Work with schools, religious institutions, and community centres to incorporate teachings of nonviolence into the curriculum and religious education.

1. **Community Empowerment:** Empower local communities by providing them with resources, skills, and opportunities for economic development. Addressing poverty and inequality can significantly reduce the potential for conflict, as people are less likely to resort to violence when

2. their basic needs are met.
3. **Leadership and Role Models:** Support and promote leaders who advocate for nonviolence and peaceful coexistence. Highlight their stories and the positive impact they have on their communities, showcasing them as role models for others to follow.
4. **Conflict Resolution Workshops:** Organize workshops and training sessions on conflict resolution and nonviolent communication. Equip community leaders, teachers, and youth with the skills to manage conflicts peacefully and constructively.
5. **Media Literacy and Responsible Reporting:** Work with media organizations to promote responsible reporting and accurate representation of different communities. Encourage media literacy programs to help the public critically analyse the information they receive and reduce the spread of hate speech.

Conclusion
"Overcoming Evil with Good" underscores the importance of embracing nonviolence as a guiding principle for peace-building in Nigeria. By drawing from the New Testament model of peace and reconciliation, individuals and communities can work together to overcome evil and build a more just, harmonious, and peaceful society. Through collective efforts rooted in love and understanding, Nigeria can move towards a future where nonviolence prevails, and conflicts are resolved through dialogue, empathy, and compassion. By embracing the principles of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation, this study explores the possibility of overcoming evil with good and paving the way for a more peaceful and harmonious Nigerian society.

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