

Theological response to insurgency in Nigeria

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Nigeria's ongoing struggle with insurgency has led to one of the most serious crises in its contemporary history, resulting in shattered communities, deep scars and a lingering atmosphere of insecurity. This research utilised a theological analysis grounded in Scripture, African theology and global perspectives on liberation and reconciliation to investigate how the church can effectively engage with insurgency. Methodologically, it relies on biblical interpretation, theological traditions of lament, forgiveness and reconciliation and contextual analyses of Nigeria's socio-political landscape. The primary findings of the research suggest that a faithful response necessitates that the church adopt a language of lament that confronts denial and honours the grief of victims; to foster a theological imagination that dismisses scapegoating and revenge-driven violence; to engage in accompaniment as a present, incarnational support for the suffering and to embody a prophetic witness by holding leaders accountable and advocating for systemic changes.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: Additionally, it shows that the reintegration of ex-combatants cannot merely be limited to state rehabilitation initiatives but must encompass theological commitments to forgiveness, accountability and communal healing. Furthermore, prevention is best pursued through interfaith collaboration, public theology that addresses corruption and poverty and investments in education and peacebuilding.

Keywords: church; insurgency; Nigeria; terrorism; theological response; violence; lament, hope; reconciliation.

Introduction

Nigeria is currently experiencing a pivotal moment in its history, having suffered through over a decade of organised violence that has disrupted its political, social and religious foundations. The insurgency that emerged in the northeast with Boko Haram has evolved into a complex crisis involving splinter groups, criminal activities, clashes between farmers and herders and increasing insecurity in many areas. As of 2025, the humanitarian consequences are immense: millions have been displaced, thousands have lost their lives and numerous individuals carry permanent scars from trauma, poverty and dislocation.

While political analysts frequently view insurgency mainly as an issue of security and governance, theological inquiry raises a more profound question: how can society comprehend such violence through the lens of God, human dignity and the mission of the church? Theology's role is not to supplant studies of security or political science but to deepen them with a moral and spiritual perspective. Theology reveals the reality of sin that might be hidden, proclaims hope in seemingly hopeless situations and calls communities to engage in justice and reconciliation efforts (Brueggemann 1984:52).

This study argues that the Nigerian church must adopt an integrated theological response to insurgency – one that is doctrinally grounded, pastorally attentive to trauma, prophetically critical of structural injustice and publicly engaged in peacebuilding. It should start with a theology of lament that honestly acknowledges the reality of suffering. It must formulate a theological understanding of violence that contextualises insurgency within the framework of the Christian faith. It should embody both supportive presence and prophetic advocacy, caring for the afflicted while holding the government and society accountable to one another and God. It must address the ethical challenges of reintegration and the limitations of punitive measures, and balance justice with forgiveness. Additionally, it should commit to interfaith cooperation and long-term prevention efforts, developing a public theology focused on peace.

The forthcoming reflections integrate perspectives from Scripture, diverse African and international theological voices, and current research on Nigeria's insurgency. The goal is not to deliver a definitive or exhaustive conclusion to the complex issues under consideration but rather to provide a theologically grounded framework that can serve as a practical guide – equipping churches, seminaries and faith leaders to discern, interpret and respond to these challenges more faithfully, responsibly and constructively within their specific social and ecclesial contexts.

Literature review

Academic engagement with insurgency in Nigeria – especially the violence linked to Boko Haram and its offshoot, Islamic State West Africa Province – has gradually moved from predominantly political analysis to sustained theological reflection. Earlier studies tended to emphasise security failure, poverty and radicalisation. More recent contributions, however, interrogate how Christian theology, ecclesial praxis and interreligious dialogue respond normatively and practically to violent extremism.

A prominent trajectory in the literature is missiological reconstruction. Alawode (2025:1–7) contends that insurgency compels the church to reconceive mission as embodied solidarity rather than abstract proclamation. Drawing from field-based interactions with clergy in Northern Nigeria, he proposes that pastoral care, community reconstruction, youth engagement and spiritual formation are integral to theological response. Mission, in this rhetoric, becomes a framework for resilience and reconstruction within traumatised communities.

Ecclesiological inquiry also features strongly. Nwashili (2025:a10360) examines how the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) negotiates institutional vulnerability amid insecurity. Utilising theological anthropology and a vulnerability paradigm, he demonstrates that the church's response encompasses humanitarian intervention, structural adaptation and collaborative peacebuilding. This approach signals a methodological development in Nigerian theology, where doctrinal reflection is integrated with empirical observation and social analysis.

Constructive theological reflection on forgiveness and justice appears in Je'Adayibe (2018:1–17), who argues that the Christian response must balance advocacy for accountability with the demands of reconciliation. He situates peacebuilding within a biblical-theological vision that resists retaliatory violence while acknowledging the state's role in maintaining order. His work marks an important shift towards public theology that addresses national crisis without retreating into ecclesial isolation.

Across these works, three dominant emphases emerge: firstly, a holistic theology of mission integrating proclamation, social responsibility and trauma healing; secondly, reconciliation theology grounded in restorative justice and

thirdly, interreligious cooperation as a theological obligation rather than a pragmatic concession. Methodologically, scholarship increasingly employs qualitative research, contextual theology and interdisciplinary frameworks.

Despite this progress, significant *lacunae* persist. Comparative denominational analyses remain underdeveloped. There is limited theological engagement with Muslim scholarly perspectives within Nigeria. Furthermore, systematic doctrinal treatments – particularly on evil, providence and political authority in insurgency contexts – require deeper elaboration. Overall, the literature reflects a transition from reactive commentary to constructive theological articulation. Contemporary scholarship no longer treats insurgency merely as a political disturbance but as a theological crisis demanding ecclesial, ethical and public engagement.

Reading the wound

Theological reflection aimed at addressing the issue of insurgency in Nigeria cannot commence with theoretical abstractions or detached thinking. It must start with recognising the wound. To understand the wound is to listen carefully to the cries of communities shattered by violence, to acknowledge the unhealed scars that mark Nigeria's land and to confess before God that these truths press upon both faith and theology with significant urgency. The wound is not merely a concept but a lived experience inscribed in flesh, memory and soil.

Throughout Scripture, lament has consistently acted as the language for expressing truth to God during times of devastation. The Psalms frequently articulate anguish, at times even charging God with abandonment (Ps 13:1). Such expressions refuse to stifle grief or whitewash injustice, affirming that God can be approached even in the depths of despair. Consequently, the practice of lament offers a theological guide for the Nigerian church to confront the insurgency with candour. Lament challenges the inclination to prematurely mask wounds with superficial reassurances or triumphalist language. Instead, it emphasises that pain must be articulated for healing to commence (Brueggemann 1984:52).

The Nigerian wound is painfully tangible. Since the emergence of Boko Haram and its splinter groups, countless lives have been lost. Villages have been destroyed, markets set ablaze and Christian communities specifically targeted for their beliefs. Families have been torn apart by abductions, such as the Chibok and Dapchi abductions, which captured global attention regarding the plight of Nigerian schoolgirls (Oduah 2024). For many, these tragedies are not far-off incidents but everyday realities. Mothers grieve for children they may never see again; fathers struggle under the weight of providing in displacement camps where hunger and illness are ever-present. When theology engages with these realities, it must reject abstraction. The narratives of the displaced, the bereaved and the orphaned necessitate that theological discourse remain connected to human suffering.

The camps for 'Internally Displaced Persons' (IDPs) serve as a stark representation of this wound. Living conditions in these camps often entail poor sanitation, overcrowding and vulnerability to disease. Entire communities grapple with maintaining their identity when ancestral lands and burial sites have been lost. For children, years without access to proper education create a cycle of despair that extremists can take advantage of. Recent human rights reports suggest that despite ongoing military campaigns, insurgent groups persist, conducting attacks that claim numerous lives in 1 day. To overlook these realities constitutes theological malpractice or sheer negligence.

Brueggemann (1978:11–15) asserts that prophetic imagination starts with lament. Authentic hope that emerges without lament is merely a hollow consolation that neglects the seriousness of suffering. Therefore, Nigerian churches must re-establish the public practice of lament. This lament can manifest in liturgical forms such as prayer vigils, communal fasts or memorial services where the names of victims are publicly recited. Remembering in a public forum is a form of resistance against the normalisation of violence. In a society where tragedies are swiftly overshadowed by the next news cycle, theological lament emphasises the importance of preserving memory. It communicates to survivors: 'Your grief matters, and your pain is a part of God's narrative'.

Nevertheless, lament should not be limited to a personal or emotional undertaking. Interpreting trauma through a theological lens also involves recognising the experiences of those affected. Individuals who have endured abduction, rape and coerced recruitment into militant groups bear deep-seated wounds that may be hidden but are no less substantial. Trauma disrupts trust, isolates people and can break the bonds of faith. Therefore, pastoral care in Nigeria needs to adopt a trauma-informed approach. Counselling that merges biblical hope with psychological understanding offers a compassionate approach in which God meets individuals amid their brokenness. Initiatives like the American Bible Society's trauma healing workshops, carried out by church networks in Nigeria, demonstrate how storytelling, communal support and prayer can collectively nurture resilience (Hill 2021:45–47). Here, theology engages not only the mind but also the profound areas of memory and fear.

Simultaneously, lament holds a political dimension. It reveals the systems and structures that sustain violence. The insurgency flourishes in contexts characterised by corruption, weak governance and the exploitation of poverty. To lament authentically is to confront these truths and resist their normalisation. Gutiérrez (1973:173) emphasises that theology must emerge from the marginalised perspective in solidarity with the impoverished and oppressed. In the context of Nigeria, this implies that theology should not only console victims but also challenge inequitable systems, whether they be government negligence, unfair resource distribution or the perversion of religion for violent means.

This prophetic nature of lament ensures that the interpretation of suffering does not devolve into passive despair. By identifying the forces that inflict pain, lament empowers communities to advocate for justice. It asserts that insurgency stems not merely from incomprehensible evil but from societal sins that need to be addressed. When the church vocalises its lament, it opposes being absorbed into a culture of silence and complicity. In this way, lament transforms into a political act that urges both the state and society to acknowledge their shortcomings and pursue reform.

Furthermore, the theological act of interpreting suffering demands patience. Healing from wounds is not a swift process. Communities ravaged by insurgency cannot simply revert to a state of 'normalcy'. Theology that hastens towards reconciliation without first confronting the profound breaches of trust risks becoming a means of denial. The biblical narrative reminds us that Israel wandered for generations before reaching the promised land, carrying their lamentations along the way. Likewise, Nigerian communities must be granted the space to mourn at their own pace, without the pressure to erase memories for the sake of expediency.

Ultimately, interpreting suffering is to affirm that God is present in places of pain. The cross of Christ represents the ultimate divine connection with those who are hurting. Christ's cry of abandonment (Mt 27:46) resonates in every Nigerian community ravaged by insurgency. In that resonance, survivors can realise that their lament is not indicative of feeble faith but of genuine faith, one that courageously presents the fullness of suffering before God. Therefore, to read the wound is to initiate theology not with radicalisations but with tears, not with victory but with honesty. It is only on this foundation that authentic hope can flourish.

Theological grammar of violence and the Christian imagination

Discussing insurgency solely in terms of statistics, security lapses or military initiatives fails to capture its profound ramifications. Violence functions not merely as an occurrence but as a means of communication, a framework that shapes how individuals perceive and act. Insurgency in Nigeria has evolved into a sort of 'grammar of death', instructing communities to view others as adversaries, to make cruelty a norm and to consider destruction as the sole expression of authority. Thus, a theological response must offer an alternative grammar, a method of talking and envisioning that dismantles the rationale of violence and redirects communities towards reconciliation.

Girard's (1977:83–95) analysis of mimetic desire and scapegoating remains one of the most insightful explorations of violence within human societies. Girard posited that humans replicate one another's desires, leading to competition and strife. To resolve such disputes, communities

frequently choose a scapegoat, projecting their shared fears onto a victim who is sacrificed to restore harmony. Insurgents in Nigeria have exploited this age-old tactic. By designating Christians, specific ethnic groups or even Western education as adversaries of God, they establish scapegoats whose elimination is framed as a sacred obligation. Violence is thus made sacred, granted theological justification that obscures the humanity of the victims from the assailants.

Christian theology fundamentally disrupts this cycle by reminding us that Christ himself was the ultimate scapegoat. The crucifixion was not merely a political execution but an unveiling of sacrificial violence itself. As the Letter to the Hebrews indicates, Jesus suffered outside the gate (Heb 13:12), enduring the humiliation of rejection so that humanity could be liberated from the cycle of retaliation. Therefore, the church in Nigeria cannot endorse any ideology, whether it be insurgent rhetoric or retaliatory language that dehumanises and scapegoats. The cross compels Christians to resist the allure of responding to violence with violence, instead bearing witness to a kingdom in which forgiveness and justice coexist.

However, the theological understanding of violence is also influenced by social contexts. Thurston's (2018:41–47) thorough examination of Boko Haram reveals that the group's theology is intertwined with feelings of exclusion and discontent. Young individuals in northern Nigeria, sidelined from economic opportunities and political engagement, were drawn to a movement that offered identity and a sense of belonging, even if through violence. In this situation, theology must broaden its perspective. Violence arises not only from twisted beliefs but also from fractured communities.

African theology has consistently highlighted the communal aspect of human existence. Mbiti's (1969:108) renowned saying, 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am', expresses an understanding of selfhood that is deeply connected to community. When this interconnectedness is damaged due to poverty, corruption or displacement, young people become vulnerable to other forms of community, including insurgent factions. The theological vision must therefore address both spiritual and social deprivation. Sharing the gospel in this environment entails not only the promise of eternal life but also the restoration of belonging, dignity and participation within the human family.

The Christian vision offers an alternative grammar rooted in reconciliation. Volf (1996:129–136) asserts that reconciliation necessitates two crucial movements: the truth of remembrance and the embrace of the other. Remembrance guarantees that injustice is neither forgotten nor minimised; embrace ensures that those responsible are not dehumanised, yet still held accountable. For Nigeria, this implies fostering stories that recognise shared humanity across ethnic and religious divides. Preaching and catechesis should cultivate believers who instinctively resist exclusive ideologies and perceive peace not as a sign of weakness but as a pivotal part of God's kingdom vocation.

Ultimately, the theological understanding of violence and the Christian imagination assert that violence does not have the ultimate say. While insurgents may try to define Nigeria's future in terms of destruction and exclusion, the church presents an alternative narrative: that God's kingdom is characterised by peace, justice and a community founded on love. Embracing this alternative perspective is not a form of naïve idealism; it is a faith anchored in the crucified and resurrected Christ, who has already nullified the power of violence by refusing to allow death to have the final say. Therefore, the responsibility of the Nigerian church is to guide its people in learning this new linguistic framework and to teach them to envision communal life not through fear and animosity but through the principles of grace and reconciliation.

Accompaniment and prophetic witness in times of terror

The response of the Nigerian church to the widespread threat of insurgency, terrorism and violence needs to integrate two essential dimensions of Christian practice: accompaniment and prophetic witness. These two facets of mission are intertwined and cannot be separated if the church aims to stay true to its mission in a society that is fragmented by trauma and injustice. Accompaniment refers to the pastoral presence of the church alongside those who are suffering, whereas prophetic witness involves the church's public advocacy for justice, accountability and systemic change. Together, they constitute a comprehensive theological response to the challenges brought by terrorism.

Accompaniment encompasses more than just providing charity or relief supplies following terrorist attacks. It represents a ministry of presence, a way of standing in solidarity with those who are afflicted. In biblical terms, accompaniment reflects the incarnational life of Christ, who chose to live among humanity rather than remain detached from its suffering (Jn 1:14). God, through Christ, did not hover above human pain but 'pitched his tent' within it. Similarly, the Nigerian church is called not only to organise relief efforts for displaced families but to dwell among them, sharing their experiences, listening to their stories and affirming their dignity. This pastoral accompaniment includes practical interventions. Displaced children need not just food and clothing but also educational support to avoid becoming a 'lost generation' susceptible to further radicalisation. Widows and widowers require vocational training to restore livelihoods ruined by insurgency. Communities in IDP camps need ongoing trauma counselling sessions that address the profound psychological impacts of violence. Such interventions represent not mere token acts of charity but a sustained commitment to rebuilding lives (Katongole 2017:112–115).

However, accompaniment requires patience, sacrifice and resilience. A common temptation for many churches is to engage in short-term humanitarian aid and then withdraw

once immediate needs appear to be addressed. Yet healing from the wounds of terror is a long and delicate journey. A theology of accompaniment insists that presence must be continuous and sacrificial. Bonhoeffer's (1959:45) insight is still relevant: 'When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die'. Genuine Christian service is thus about costly discipleship, rather than cheap grace. To walk alongside the displaced is to partake in their suffering, often at considerable cost to comfort, resources and even personal safety. Furthermore, accompaniment is not confined to material help. It involves the ministry of listening, lamentation and prayer. Victims of terror commonly feel abandoned, not just by the state but sometimes by God as well. Through its steadfast presence, the church embodies God's promise that they are not forgotten. In this sense, accompaniment becomes a sacrament of hope.

While accompaniment provides solace, prophetic witness confronts the systems that sustain suffering. The military response of the Nigerian state to insurgency has secured certain tactical victories, but it has also been tainted by corruption, insufficient rehabilitation of victims and accusations of human rights abuses. In this environment, the church cannot remain silent. Prophetic witness requires Christian leaders to speak truth to power, reflecting the biblical prophets who reminded rulers of their covenant obligations to deliver justice and protect the vulnerable (Am 5:24). This prophetic duty encompasses both condemnation and constructive proposals. On the one hand, churches need to denounce corruption in the military and political spheres that hamper effective counter-insurgency efforts. On the other hand, churches can advocate for policies that address the vulnerabilities exploited by insurgents – such as insufficient access to education, youth unemployment and the neglect of agricultural communities (Marshall 2009:198–202). By pushing for reforms in these areas, the church fulfils a prophetic role not only in critique but also in reconstruction.

Prophetic witnessing should not be practiced in solitude. The church in Nigeria can enhance its witness by collaborating with civil society organisations, human rights advocacy groups and international allies. Such partnerships strengthen the church's moral stance and create opportunities for policy advocacy that might otherwise be unattainable on its own. Prophetic witnessing goes beyond mere sermons but evolves into a strategic, cooperative effort aimed at systemic change.

There is always a risk of an imbalance between support and prophecy. In the absence of support, prophetic witness may become theoretical, empty rhetoric disconnected from the actual experiences of those suffering. Conversely, without prophecy, support could devolve into complicity, as the church soothes the distressed without tackling the underlying causes of their suffering. A faithful response necessitates maintaining a dynamic balance between the two. Thus, the Nigerian church must be alongside those

enduring trauma while also voicing demands for justice in the public arena. It must grieve with those in sorrow while actively holding those in power accountable. A theology that harmonises support and prophecy is comprehensive, reflecting both the compassion of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37) and the boldness of Nathan in confronting King David (2 Sam 12).

Reintegration, forgiveness and the limit to punishments

Nigeria faces a significant challenge in addressing how to handle insurgents who either surrender or are captured during the ongoing battle against insurgency. The government has trialled initiatives such as Operation Safe Corridor, aimed at rehabilitating and reintegrating defectors. Those who participate in this programme receive vocational training, psychological support and even entrepreneurial opportunities after their demobilisation (Onuoha 2019:113–129). While the initiative has achieved some positive outcomes, it has also encountered considerable scepticism from various sectors. Numerous communities, still grappling with the aftermath of violence, regard reintegration with doubt, fearing it might encourage impunity or provoke new episodes of violence. Victims often question whether genuine justice has been achieved when offenders seem to receive light treatment. This conflict between the concept of justice and the inclination towards forgiveness is one of the most challenging dilemmas for theology in the Nigerian context.

From a theological perspective, reintegration engages with foundational issues of the Christian faith: forgiveness, justice and reconciliation. Forgiveness cannot be forced, nor can it be granted superficially in ways that overlook accountability. Volf (1996:120) rightly cautions against what he terms 'cheap forgiveness', the risk of prematurely dismissing the severity of harm by offering pardon without recognising the offense. Such forgiveness lacks depth and can be detrimental, as it may perpetuate violence by denying victims the acknowledgment they deserve. Nonetheless, the church must also recognise the equally significant truth that Christian theology asserts: no sinner is without the possibility of redemption. The crucifixion encapsulates the tension between divine justice and divine mercy. The cross denounces sin while simultaneously enabling forgiveness, and this paradox offers the theological foundation for contemplating reintegration.

A comprehensive theological framework for reintegration must balance three essential components. The first is accountability. Those responsible for violence must confront justice, whether through formal legal systems or community-led truth processes. Accountability does not inherently entail retribution, but it does necessitate truth-telling, acknowledgment and consequences that reflect the gravity of the harm caused. Overlooking accountability risks and diminishes the suffering of victims and erodes the rule of law. The second component is repentance.

True reintegration cannot happen without genuine remorse and acknowledgment of wrongs done. Admitting guilt, apologising to victims and taking responsibility for offenses are crucial indicators of repentance. Without this, reintegration risks becoming little more than a political tactic or a means for insurgents to reorganise. The third component is restoration. In addition to legal justice, rebuilding community life demands deliberate efforts to mend broken relationships, support survivors and avert recidivism. This could include reparations, reconciliation ceremonies and practical support systems that enable both victims and former combatants to rebuild their lives on new foundations.

African theologies of reconciliation greatly enhance this framework by highlighting the communal aspect of healing. Katongole and Rice (2008:56-59) posit that reconciliation transcends mere conflict resolution; it involves reassembling communities through truth and grace. In Nigeria, reintegration must not solely focus on the individual rehabilitation of ex-combatants. It should also encompass a collective process that fosters spaces for truth-telling, rituals of mourning and shared recognition of loss. Traditional African reconciliation methods often incorporate public confessions, symbolic cleansing rituals and acts of restitution to help communities progress. The church, drawing from both Christian and African traditions, can serve as a mediator by facilitating these processes. Churches possess spiritual assets such as prayer, sacramental practices and preaching, along with the moral authority needed to facilitate discussions among victims, perpetrators and communities.

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of reintegration and forgiveness. Certain offenses, such as mass murder, wartime rape and child abductions, are so severe that pursuing easy reintegration without significant accountability risks undermining justice. In these instances, theological discussions must uphold the dignity of victims by insisting on the pursuit of justice. In Christian understanding, forgiveness does not contradict justice; instead, it calls for justice to be administered in a manner that rejects revenge while leaving room for redemption. Although offenders may face legal penalties, the church can continue to pray for their transformation, understanding that final judgment is God's prerogative. This eschatological perspective liberates Christians from the obligation of achieving perfect justice in this life while still emphasising the importance of pursuing justice in the present.

Another obstacle resides in the social interactions surrounding reintegration. Communities that have endured violence from insurgents often resist welcoming back those who have harmed them. Victims, particularly those who have suffered the loss of loved ones, may view reintegration as a slight against their grief. In this regard, the church can act as a mediator. Pastors and theologians can develop liturgies of mourning and forgiveness that enable victims to express

their anguish openly to God while gradually fostering reconciliation. These rituals do not force victims into forgiveness but offer a structure within which the healing journey can progress over time. Community reconciliation cannot be imposed by the government; it must be patiently nurtured through pastoral support, public acknowledgment of truths and ongoing dialogue.

The experience of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission offers a partial example, though it is not without flaws. By providing a venue for offenders to publicly admit their crimes in return for amnesty, the commission recognised the importance of truth as a necessary step towards healing. Nigeria can learn from such approaches but should tailor them to fit its unique religious, cultural and political environment. Churches can play an important role in modifying these practices, anchoring them in both civic engagement and a theological framework of justice and grace.

Ultimately, the theological challenge of reintegration involves rejecting simplistic choices. It is not merely a decision between justice and forgiveness, but rather striving for equilibrium in which accountability, contrition and restoration come together. Christian theology maintains that forgiveness is achievable, but only in the context of truth. Justice must be sought, but not in ways that preclude the chance for reconciliation. Communities must be reconstructed, but not at the expense of dismissing victims' voices. By navigating this intricate landscape, Nigeria can aspire to break free from relentless cycles of violence and move towards a peaceful future. The church, by intertwining forgiveness with justice, judgment with mercy, can offer the moral and theological support needed for this sensitive endeavour.

Interfaith solidarity and the public theology of prevention

Ultimately, a theological approach must extend beyond immediate emergencies to focus on long-term prevention strategies. Insurgency flourishes in divided societies where poverty, corruption and distrust among religions exist. Thus, prevention necessitates interfaith cooperation and public theology.

Nigeria's religious environment is highly diverse, and insurgency has frequently taken advantage of the animosity between adherents of Christianity and Islam. Initiatives like the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council demonstrate that interfaith dialogue can enhance resilience against radicalisation. Theologically, such dialogue is grounded in mutual recognition of human dignity and the sacredness of life. Churches should oppose sectarian language and collaborate with Muslim leaders to avert communal violence and promote peace.

Public theology takes this a step further by confronting systemic issues. Corruption, unemployment and the decline

of education contribute to the environment that fosters insurgency. Campbell (2020:112) points out that without addressing governmental failures, military successes will only be fleeting. Consequently, churches must advocate reforms in education, land management and youth empowerment. They should view themselves not only as religious institutions but also as civic participants shaping society's ethical landscape.

Education is pivotal in prevention efforts. Theological institutions need to incorporate more courses on peace studies and conflict resolution into their programmes, preparing clergy to tackle insurgency from both religious or spiritual and societal angles. Congregations can establish literacy initiatives, vocational training centres and youth groups that offer a sense of community and purpose, counteracting the appeal of insurgent recruitment.

Additionally, a public theology of prevention emphasises the importance of memory. Communities that neglect their past sufferings risk repeating cycles of violence. Churches should safeguard narratives of resilience, create memorial traditions for victims and educate younger generations about the significance of peace. In doing so, they foster what Volf (1996) describes as a 'memory hospitable to the future', one that acknowledges truth without succumbing to vengeance.

Conclusion

Nigeria's enduring battle with insurgency has inflicted profound wounds on its societal structure, communities and national consciousness. Villages have been left in ruins, families separated and countless children deprived of the stability essential for thriving. These injuries will not heal overnight, nor can they be resolved through simple measures. Nevertheless, the Christian theological tradition asserts that grace can emerge even amid devastation. The task for the church, then, is to embody this hope by providing a comprehensive and faithful response.

This response begins with genuine grief. The Psalms demonstrate that lament is not a sign of weakness but a faithful expression that lays bare anguish before God. The church must embody accompaniment by providing trauma-informed pastoral care, legal aid referrals, livelihood support for displaced families and consistent community visitation. Simultaneously, it should exercise prophetic witness through evidence-based advocacy, public statements against corruption, civic education forums, policy engagement with legislators and coalitions with credible civil society actors to demand transparency and institutional accountability. The cross remains the church's pivotal symbol in this endeavour. It reassures victims of God's presence, exposes the futility of violence and directs attention towards a hopeful future. To embrace the cross in Nigeria today requires practical commitment: establishing reconciliation ministries, incorporating

lament and intercessory prayer in worship, teaching a theology of justice and forgiveness, supporting victims through tangible care, fostering interfaith dialogue, encouraging ethical civic engagement and modelling servant leadership that embodies sacrificial love in fractured communities.

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