

# TURN THE OTHER CHEEK: THE MISLEADING CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION AND VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Ibrahim S. Bitrus  
(Federal College of Education in Yola, Nigeria)  
Seth Mbusa Atiko  
(Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria)

**Abstract:** Christians in northern Nigeria suffer horrendous persecution in the forms of physical and social injustices from Fulani tribesmen, Islamic Fulani political elites, and other various jihadists who are, whether actively or passively, supported by the current government administration. Guided by the misleading interpretation of the teaching of Jesus Christ referred to as “turn the other cheek,” Christians are taught to accept such physical and social injustices with total submission and silence. In this article, we have investigated whether this teaching of Jesus really means that Christians should accept physical and social injustice in silence and acquiescence. We have also recast “turn the other cheek” with a better way for Christians to respond to persecution and social injustice.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2020, a pastor narrated to us how a lady was beaten to death on the street in broad daylight by her kinsmen because she was making efforts to convert from Islam to Christianity. This incident happened in Hong town, northern Nigeria,<sup>1</sup> but the Christians there did nothing about it. We asked the pastor why she didn't speak up about it; she replied, “I didn't do anything because I know that we are meant to suffer these kinds of things as Christians.” Her answer is most certainly inspired by the teaching of “turning the other cheek,” which is one of the central teachings of the Christian church. The Lord Jesus Christ in his Sermon on the Mount instructed Christians to turn the other cheek when slapped on the right cheek (Matthew 5:39).

This injunction is one among many that was given by the Lord himself, which must be observed by anyone who claims to be a Christian. Christians all over the world, but especially in Nigeria, recognize and practice the teaching of turning the other cheek. But sadly, the teaching is grossly misunderstood in Nigeria to mean not only sheer acquiescence but passive submission to evil. In this paper, we have unearthed the background to the persecution of the church in northern Nigeria and the passive response to it, often inspired by a misleading interpretation of the teaching on turning the other cheek. Recasting the teaching, we have argued that it does not mean absolute passive acquiescence and silence in the face of injustice; rather, it means nonviolent response through speaking up and seeking legal redress in the court of law.

## CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION AND VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Nigeria is a complex, multi-religious society that is home to Islam and Christianity, the two dominant religions. Although the exact percentages of Muslims and Christians cannot be found in any national document, it is fair to estimate that the two religions command equal numbers of followers, with each accounting for about 45 percent of the country's population. Northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslim, while Christians are largely a minority. The interaction between Muslims and Christians in this part of the country had been friendly, but now is largely confrontational and even violent, as inspired by the Islamic

<sup>1</sup> Hong is both a town and a Local Government Area in the Northeastern zone of Nigeria. It is located on 10°13'54"N 12°55'49"E

ideology of supremacy, bigotry, and exclusion. This has had its antecedents in the colonial period, where the colonial authorities accorded preferential treatment to Islam over Christianity in northern Nigeria. Perceiving Christianity as a disruptive force to the Islamic religion and the well-established Fulani Muslim empire in the north, the Fulani emirs colluded with the colonial authorities and prohibited Christian missionaries from evangelizing their subjects. The colonial authorities made and executed anti-Christian policies that prevented Christian missionaries from publicly preaching the gospel and proselytizing the people.<sup>2</sup> According to Ibrahim S. Bitrus,

The anti-Christian colonial policies and attitudes towards Christian missions set the unjust precedent for how the predominantly Muslim states of Northern Nigeria have continued to treat the Church in their respective states. In many ways, these anti-Christian policies laid the foundation for the recurring violence which the empire and its foot soldiers...have continued to unleash against the Church in the north. The discriminatory practices against the church and its members have persisted in more subtle ways in post-colonial northern Nigeria.<sup>3</sup>

The Christian Church in northern Nigeria, whether individually or collectively, has continued to suffer, even to this day, physical abuses and social injustice under the northern Islamic Fulani hegemony as a result of its literal obedience to Jesus' teaching of turning the other cheek. These include verbal abuses, forceful conversion into Islam, denial of admission into schools, denial of employment, denial of due promotion, unjust rulings in court cases, forceful confiscation of land and other properties, murder, rape, and destruction of farm products and houses.<sup>4</sup>

This subtle persecution has lately morphed into a full-blown violence against the church, its members, and their properties. The church has suffered horrendous and brutal forms of terrorism at the hands of different Islamist terror groups in the northern region of the country. These armed, vicious terror groups have not only attacked and destroyed Christian places of worship, but also maimed and killed Christians even during worship times, including priests. They have raided and plundered the predominantly Christian communities and displaced or killed the inhabitants, many of whom are women and children. In his recent compelling testimony to the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee on the Nigerian Situation on the Religious Freedom Hearings, Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah captures the persecution of Christians in Nigeria vividly. At the hearing, the bishop said:

Persecution of Christians in Nigeria has occurred at different levels with almost the same pattern, sometimes subtle, often outrightly violent and destructive. A few examples. There have been dastardly actions directed at Christians because of their faith. We have cases of Pastoral agents, such as Priests and Nuns, who have been kidnapped, released after the payment of ransom, or brutally murdered. Churches, medical facilities, and presbyteries have been razed to the ground with no provocation from the communities.<sup>5</sup>

Underreported statistics reveal that persecution has destroyed substantial life and property of the church and its members. According to *Open Doors International* research, "Christians are being targeted in northern Nigeria. From 2006 to 2014, between 9,000 and 11,500 Christians were killed. More than a million have been affected, with many driven from their homes, and 13,000 churches have been destroyed

---

<sup>2</sup> Yusuf Turaki, "The State of Christianity in Northern Nigeria," Paper presented at the Congress of Northern Nigeria Christians (CNNC), Murtala Square, Kaduna, November 11, 2017, 12-14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibrahim S. Bitrus, "Luther's Doctrine of Just War and the Contemporary Northern Nigerian Church," in *Bronnum Journal of Theological Research*, 2 (2020): 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> Emeka Umeagbalasi, "Nigeria Is A Killing Field Of Defenseless Christians." *Genocide Watch*, last modified 2020, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2020/04/13/nigeria-is-a-killing-field-of-defenseless-christians> (accessed July 21, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Hassan Kukah, "Statement to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on the Nigerian Situation on the Religious Freedom Hearings," Washington D.C., July 13, 2021.

or abandoned.”<sup>6</sup> The statistics of Christians killed since 2015 to this day is more startling! Emeka Umeagbalasi reports, “Credible statistics show that from June 2015 to February 2020, between 11,500 and 12,000 Christians were murdered by Boko Haram, jihadist Fulani herdsmen, and ‘Bandits/Highway Kidnappers.’<sup>7</sup> The masterminds of this religious persecution and violence against the church are not faceless. The perpetrators are “radical Islamic groups such as Boko Haram, armed Muslim Fulani herdsmen, and the northern Muslim political and religious elite.”<sup>8</sup>

The most depressing thing about Nigerian religious persecution and violence against the church is that it is masterminded and executed with the explicit complicity of the current national administration. The impunity with which these Islamic terrorist groups carry out their attacks without state actors taking stringent measures to prevent, arrest, and prosecute them bears eloquent testimony to the complicity of the government. Umeagbalasi contends,

‘Figure spinning’ and ‘mangling’ have also become part of the Federal Government’s conspiracy and complicity. The Government denies outrightly the casualty figures associated with Jihadist Herdsmen killings and damages. Or it mangles and minimizes the statistics. Censorship, false denials and falsehoods also characterize the Government’s response to Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen’s butcheries.<sup>9</sup>

At the time of writing this paper, the government has warned media houses against giving a detailed report of any terrorist’s attacks. The state actors vowed to deal directly with any media outlet that disobeys the government’s warning.<sup>10</sup>

## MISLEADING CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION AND VIOLENCE

The aforementioned catalogue of the incidences of religious persecution and violence clearly demonstrates that Christians in Nigeria are figuratively and literally slapped on one cheek in ways unimaginable. But sadly, all that the Christians in Nigeria have done about that is to “turn the other cheek” in obedience to the command of their Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. That is, their response to these incessant attacks is mostly passive silence and zero self-defense. This usual passive silence and zero self-defense from Christians in northern Nigeria is largely due to the popular understanding of Jesus’ teaching to “turn the other cheek.” However, the popular understanding and interpretation of turning the other cheek among Christians in northern Nigeria is largely wrong and destructively misleading.

A typical Christian in Northern Nigeria is taught to ignore, overlook, keep mute, and endure any form of physical abuse and social injustice in obedience to the teaching of Jesus Christ on turning the other cheek. Sometimes, Christians are discouraged from speaking up or seeking justice, even through legal and legitimate means. On several occasions, young Christian girls under eighteen years of age are forcibly married to Muslims in the houses of Muslim traditional leaders without the consent of their parents, and the cases remain unresolved legally. Sometimes parents are counselled by members of the clergy to leave the matter in God’s hands. What pastors often do is to pray with and for such parents, believing God will intervene and fight for them. In a particular location, a large portion of land originally allocated to Christians for use as a cemetery was carved out and sold by the Muslim district head of the area. The local Christian leaders agreed to ignore the matter for the sake of peace.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Arne Mulders, “*Crushed but not Defeated, the Impact of Persistent Violence on the Church in Northern Nigeria*,” in *Open Doors International*, February 2016, <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/about/how-we-help/advocacy/nigeria-report-12> (accessed October 27, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Umeagbalasi, “Nigeria Is A Killing Field Of Defenseless Christians,” in *Genocide Watch*.

<sup>8</sup> Mulders, “Crushed but not Defeated, the Impact of Persistent Violence on the Church in Northern Nigeria.

<sup>9</sup> Umeagbalasi, “Nigeria Is A Killing Field Of Defenseless Christians,” in *Genocide Watch*.

<sup>10</sup> Annie Nwosu. “NBC Orders Media Outlets to Desist from Revealing Victims, Details of Terrorist Attacks,” in *Daily Post*, July 16, 2021, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/dailypost.ng/2021/07/16/nbc-orders-media-outlets-to-desist-from-revealing-victims-details-of-terrorist-attacks/%3famp=1> (Accessed 1 August 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Julia Bicknell, “Nigeria’s Kano State Governor converts Christian under-age girl to Islam,” in *World Watch Monitor*. April 22, 2020. <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2020/04/nigerias-kano-state-governor-converts-christian-under-age-girl-to>

These and many more disheartening, insidious persecutions occur on a daily basis, and Christians in northern Nigeria do nothing about it in obedience to the teaching of Jesus Christ on turning the other cheek. The injunction has been misinterpreted as absolute nonresistance and as a total refusal to take revenge on the persecutors. Through preaching the total renunciation of retaliation and encouraging submission to persecution, too many Nigerian Christians believe that Christ will fight the persecutors for them because vengeance is God's. Christian music artists have composed a song to justify and reinforce the literal understanding and application of turning the other cheek. *Ba zamu rama ba, sai dai Yesu ne zaya rama* as the song goes. In translation: "We will not avenge; Christ alone will avenge for us."<sup>12</sup> Turning the other cheek is seen as a mark of being a true Christian. Obedience to Christ's command to turn the other cheek exemplifies the suffering and the cross that the true Christians have to bear to keep them on their spiritual toes, for without which they will be spiritually lazy and sleepy.

Consequently, all attempts by the Christians at resisting or seeking redress for any injustice perpetrated against them under the pretext of religious persecution are often met with outright condemnation from the Christian community. They are quickly reminded that Christians are peacemakers who should make rather than break peace, but they forget that where there is injustice, there can't be peace! Instead of rightly interpreting and applying the 'turn the other cheek' text, a myriad of different impractical ways are suggested for dealing with the persecution. The most usual suggestion is almost always to encourage the persecuted Christians to fast and pray. Stephen Olusola Awotunde is one such scholar who suggests a prayerful response to persecution, even though he discourages the church from offering imprecations that would have God destroy its persecutors. Rather, Awotunde recommends that persecuted Christians pray for the audacity to carry out the Great Commission. He believes that prayer that is accompanied by miraculous signs and wonders, which cannot be discredited by their persecutors, would persuade them to embrace the gospel and bring an end to the persecution. "This should be the focus of Nigerian churches and not how to acquire ammunition for counter retaliation on the persecutor."<sup>13</sup>

Ibrahim Bitrus offers a compelling analysis of the lingering phenomenon of persecution against the church and the spiritual response to it in northern Nigeria. The spiritual response to persecution that he also proposes is nonviolent confrontation. To stem the protracted problem of persecution, Bitrus argues "for an unwavering faith rooted in the liberating presence of the crucified God in the midst of God's suffering people. Such a faithful path better promises victory over persecution for the church in northern Nigeria."<sup>14</sup>

The big question here is, does Jesus Christ actually want injustice to prevail? It is very clear from the Gospels that Jesus Christ would not actually want to have injustice meted out continually on either his followers or anyone else. Jesus Christ, who minces no words in condemning injustice, would not allow injustice to be perpetrated against anyone! If this is the case, we suspect that the meaning of words in the teaching of Jesus Christ on turning the other cheek has been misunderstood.

---

islam/?\_cf\_chl\_jschl\_tk\_=pmd\_d0fda4d9db6c05de421c5830d77e2463bdd8dc50-1626498305-0-gqNtZGzNAijicnBszQmO (accessed July 14, 2024).

<sup>12</sup> This does not however mean that there is unanimous acceptance and practice of the injunction to turn the other cheek as absolute nonresistance among Christians in northern Nigeria. There is a Christian militant group that has completely rejected the doctrine and advocated active resistance of matching "blood for more blood, violence for more violence, and life for more lives." See Sunday Bobai Agang, *No More Cheeks to Turn?* (Bukuru, Jos: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2017), 47. The group believes that Christians have turned both cheeks to their persecutors in northern Nigeria and there is no more cheek for them to turn. They're left no other option but violent resistance!

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Olusola Awotunde, "Christians 'Response to Persecution: Its Implications to Contemporary Churches in Nigeria," in *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 4, (2016): 49.

<sup>14</sup> Ibrahim S. Bitrus, "The Persecution of the Church in Northern Nigeria," in *Word and World* 36, 4 (2016): 385.

## REINTERPRETING 'TURN THE OTHER CHEEK'

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matt. 5:38-39 NKJV).

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is a law that was only enforced in a civil court. Although it was expressly a judicial affair in the Old Testament (Deut. 19:16-21), the scribes of Jesus' time took laws into their hands and often times taught the people to personally retaliate or express vengeance against God's injunction as He had placed punishment in the hands of the judges and the magisterial system.<sup>15</sup> Jesus built on the original intention of the law and refuted the teachings of the scribes of that time by discouraging personal retaliation and/or vengeance when offended by another person. This he further expressed when he instructed his followers "not to resist an evil person," as resistance would mostly lead to violence. The teaching of Jesus meant that we should not hit back when someone slaps us.<sup>16</sup>

Though "an eye for an eye" entails a legal vindication, Jesus did not interfere with the magisterial aspect of it, which actually gives justice to the poor, he negated the idea of private resentment and resistance, which mostly leads to violence and disruption of peace. In essence, Jesus restored and upheld the magisterial and legal aspects of the law by forbidding private revenge and retaliation.<sup>17</sup>

Jesus went beyond the Mosaic injunction and commanded his followers to turn the other cheek when slapped on the right cheek. The question is whether these words should be interpreted literally or figuratively. According to Martin Luther, to rightly interpret the text requires exegetes to make a clear-cut distinction between spiritual and temporal matters with respect to the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world. Collapsing the distinction between the two leads to a gross misunderstanding of the text. For example, the Pharisees interpreted the Mosaic tit-for-tat law intended for use by temporal authorities to mean that everyone could assume personal responsibility for avenging their own injustice. Luther argues that Jesus proclaimed the teaching of turn the other cheek to counter such pharisaic false interpretations and to teach Christians to be more than willing as private individuals to refrain from taking revenge not only "with the fist, but also in heart, with their thoughts and all their faculties. In short, he calls for a heart that is not impatient, revengeful or disposed to break the peace."<sup>18</sup>

Should we then tolerate every form of injustice and violence meted out to us under every circumstance and do nothing about it? For Luther, the answer depends on the capacity in which one is turning the other cheek. In our capacity as members of Christ's kingdom, the injunction to turn the other cheek means that we should not resist injustice; instead, we should accept, endure, forgive, and even repay it with good. But in our capacity as public officials of the worldly kingdom, we should tolerate no injustice; we should not only guard against evil and punish it for the sake of our neighbor but also help to defend and maintain what is good, just, and right for the common well-being and peace of the society.

For Walter Wink, Jesus' command to turn the other cheek neither means we should cowardly submit to those who perpetrate injustice and violence against us nor violently reprise them. Rather, turning the other cheek means the victims of injustice should nonviolently refuse to be humiliated and dehumanized by oppressors. Through turning the other cheek, the victims not only put their oppressors to an unbearable shame and strip them of the power to humiliate, but also invariably reassert their humanity and dignity from the oppressors. According to Wink, Jesus is encouraging the victim to "stand up for

<sup>15</sup> See Donald H. Spence, *The Pulpit Commentary* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 2006), and John Calvin, "Calvin's Commentaries" (Michigan: Baker House, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Wayne Grudem, "A Biblical Argument for Self-Defense," *Crossway* (August 27, 2018), <https://www.crossway.org.articles/a-biblical-argument-for-self-defense/> (accessed June 20, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Spence, *The Pulpit Commentary*.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, translated by Charge A. Hay (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1892), 101. Accessed at: [https://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/LUT\\_CSMT.PDF](https://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/LUT_CSMT.PDF)

yourselves, defy your masters, assert your humanity; but don't answer the oppressor in kind. Find a new, third way that is neither cowardly submission nor violent reprisal."<sup>19</sup>

A convincing interpretation appears in the application of the teaching by Jesus himself when he was slapped on the cheek. We read his response in the Johannine account of his arrest and trial and, particularly, while he was brought before Annas for trial. The scripture narrates the event at which Jesus was slapped on the cheek: "When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. 'Is this the way you answer the high priest?' he demanded. 'If I said something wrong' Jesus replied, 'testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?'" (John 18:22-23 NIV).

There is no better application to the teaching of turn the other cheek than John 18:22-23. Jesus himself, having been struck in the face, never presented his face to be struck again nor kept mute to let such injustice remain unchallenged. He spoke up in his defense and demanded justice in an orderly manner. When this act is viewed in the context of and as an application of turning the other cheek, the teaching of Jesus himself does not imply a literal but rather a figurative meaning.

Turning the other cheek does not mean that Christians should physically present their faces to be struck again or even allow themselves to be physically or socially abused. Rather, it only implies that they should not resort to physical resistance, just as the law of retaliation originally required. But they should speak up for themselves, nonviolently challenge injustice, and seek redress. Sunday Bobai Agang rightly grasps the interpretation of the teaching when he claims that it "does not mean that we simply accept any injustice done to us. It does mean that we respond with dignity and are free to appeal to the law and to justice."<sup>20</sup> The teaching of turn the other cheek, if viewed in light of Jesus' reaction when he was slapped, clearly indicates that "turning the other cheek" is not meant to be understood in the literal sense.

#### SELF DEFENSE: PAUL'S PROTEST AND USE OF WISDOM IN ACTS 23:1-10

At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" ... Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

As the reformers have said, scripture interprets scripture.<sup>21</sup> Since this is true, we can appeal to Paul's experience as a solid reference to the application of the teaching of turning the other cheek.

Paul the Apostle was also struck on the face during his trial before the council. Having defended himself and proven not to have committed any crime, the high priest ordered that he be slapped on the mouth. He was slapped, but he also did not allow himself to be slapped again; rather, he defended himself in a non-violent manner. He spoke up firmly as he said, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" Having known his rights and that the law had been broken, he stated the facts and made it known to all that the law had been broken. The phrase "whitewashed wall" most likely refers to the description of hypocritical leaders in Ezekiel 13:10ff.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Walter Wink, "Jesus' Third Way" (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

<https://www.cpt.org/files/BN%20-%20Jesus%27%20Third%20Way.pdf> (accessed July 24, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Sunday Bobai Agang, *No More Cheeks to Turn?* (Bukuru, Jos: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2017), 58.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Lange, *Scripture Interprets Scripture: What Does this Mean?* 1517, June 23, 2020.

<https://www.1517.org/articles/scripture-interprets-scripture-what-does-this-mean> (accessed July 24, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Colorado: Victor Books/Scripture Press, 1992).

Having put up a defense, he further made efforts to free himself. He observed the council and skillfully employed wisdom to free himself from the group. He observed the group and found a way to build common ground with a section of it, thereby securing their defense and protection:

Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided ... and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

## TOLERANCE AND PACIFISM

As a largely practical concept, tolerance is a subject that has been put into practice from the beginning of the Christian faith and throughout history. Despite having a place in Christianity, tolerance is a concept that has been wrongly applied, and that is practically destroying the Church.<sup>23</sup>

The concept of tolerance has been overstretched and applied even in places where it does not belong.<sup>24</sup> And this is harmful to our lives as people of the faith, as it has made us soft targets and deprived us of conviction in certain crucial life decisions.

The meaning of tolerance varies: some consider it the practice of turning a blind eye to wrongdoing, while others see it as forgiveness and the expression of God's unconditional love. Tolerance does not mean allowing a wrong to occur unchallenged but rather a wrong must be corrected for what it is, as Jesus has demonstrated in his dealings with Mary Magdalene and the Self-Righteous Young Rich Ruler.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, pacifism is also a concept that has long been practiced and overstretched in the Christian faith. Rooted in the total rejection of violence, the concept promotes peace and peaceful coexistence; the concept is sometimes taken to an extreme, whereby a wrong act against Christians is met with silence and zero resistance from the Christians in question.

Both tolerance and pacifism definitely have their places in Christianity and are acceptable, but only under certain circumstances and to certain extents. When it comes to matters of private or personal choice, every individual may draw their own conclusions and, as such, their views may be considered personal. But when it comes to issues of a biblical basis, the teachings of the Bible become the standard.<sup>26</sup> When this is applied to the subject of turning the other cheek, Christians must rather opt for the truth about Scripture's interpretation, not how contemporary or past people view it, and the truth is found in Scripture. We must interpret the concept not in light of emotions and circumstances but in light of Scripture as it interprets itself. If Jesus and Paul the Apostle did not turn a blind eye to a wrong done to them but rather challenged it, we also must not turn a blind eye to a wrongdoing.

## CONCLUSION

Inasmuch as Christians are scripturally instructed to be peacemakers, there is a place for self-defense in the Christian faith.<sup>27</sup> Self-defense, however, must be pursued in non-violent, legal ways. It is ideal that

<sup>23</sup> David Wilson Rogers, "The Concept of Tolerance in the Church," in *Carlsbad Current Argus* (March 24, 2018), <https://currentargus.com/story/life/faith/2018/03/24/concept-tolerance-church/449499002> (accessed July 24, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Billy Graham, "The Sin of Tolerance," in *Christianity Today* (February 2, 1959), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1959/february-2/sin-of-tolerance.html> (accessed July 24, 2024).

<sup>25</sup> Roland C. Warren, "Are Christians Called to Be Tolerant? What would Jesus say?," in *Abundant Life Blog* (September 3, 2019), [https://www.care-net.org/abundant-life-blog/are-christians-called-to-be-tolerant-what-would-jesus-say?hs\\_amp=true](https://www.care-net.org/abundant-life-blog/are-christians-called-to-be-tolerant-what-would-jesus-say?hs_amp=true) (accessed July 24, 2021).

<sup>26</sup> Robert Velarde, "True Tolerance: Faithfully Serving the God of Truth," in *Focus on the family* (January 1, 2008), <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/true-tolerance-faithfully-serving-the-god-of-truth/> (accessed July 30, 2023).

<sup>27</sup> Grudem, "A Biblical Argument for Self-Defense."

Christians, especially those in northern Nigeria, be taught to be peace makers, but in times when injustice is experienced, Christians must be taught to speak up and rise in non-violent self-defense. The teaching of “turning the other cheek” must be taught in its context and not in ways that promote sheer acquiescence and silence in the face of injustice.<sup>28</sup>

Christians should speak up against injustice as Jesus and Paul did or seek justice from relevant authorities as the persistent widow in Jesus’ parable did (Luke 18:3ff). This fact must be preached in northern Nigeria, and Christians should be thoroughly informed of this. Injustice perpetrated against Christians in northern Nigeria must not be allowed to prevail!

---

<sup>28</sup> Graham, “The Sin of Tolerance.”