



CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION AS A FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING RELIGIOUS TERRORISM IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Religious terrorism remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria, despite the peace-oriented teachings embedded within the country's dominant religious traditions. This study examines Christian Theology of Liberation as a framework for addressing this contradiction between religious ideals and violent realities. The paper adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach, relying on critical analysis of biblical texts and relevant theological and socio-political literature. It situates liberation theology within its broader intellectual tradition and explores its emphasis on justice, human dignity, and the liberation of the oppressed as a basis for engaging the structural and ideological drivers of religious violence. The study identifies key factors sustaining religious terrorism in Nigeria, including poverty, intolerance, political manipulation of religion, and fanaticism, and argues that these conditions create fertile ground for extremist mobilization. It further contends that liberation theology, when properly contextualized, offers a constructive lens for rethinking religious engagement in conflict situations by promoting non-violence, social responsibility, and interfaith coexistence. However, the paper also recognizes the practical and institutional limitations that may hinder its full application within the Nigerian context. The study concludes that Christian Theology of Liberation provides a viable, though not exhaustive, framework for addressing religious terrorism by foregrounding justice-oriented and transformative religious practice.

Keywords: Christian Theology of Liberation; Religious Terrorism; Social Justice; Nigeria; Peacebuilding.

Introduction

Religious terrorism has, in recent decades, assumed a complex and troubling dimension within global security discourse, with its manifestations increasingly intersecting with questions of identity, ideology, and power. While religion has historically functioned as a source of moral guidance and social cohesion, contemporary realities reveal its instrumentalization in violent conflicts across different regions of the world. Scholars have noted that the post-Cold War era has witnessed a resurgence of religion as a significant factor in global politics, particularly in the mobilization of extremist movements and justification of violence (Juergensmeyer, 2020; Kessler & Arkush, 2021). This development has challenged earlier assumptions that modernization would lead to the decline of religion in public life. Instead, religion has re-emerged as a potent force, capable of both fostering peace and legitimizing conflict, depending on how it is interpreted and deployed.



In the Nigerian context, the entanglement of religion with socio-political realities has produced a particularly volatile environment. Nigeria's pluralistic religious landscape, characterized primarily by Christianity and Islam alongside indigenous belief systems, has often been marked by tension, competition, and, at times, violent confrontation. The persistence of groups such as Boko Haram and its splinter factions has drawn international attention to the role of religious ideology in shaping patterns of violence within the country. Studies have demonstrated that religious terrorism in Nigeria cannot be understood solely in doctrinal terms but must be situated within broader structural conditions, including poverty, governance deficits, youth unemployment, and regional inequalities (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2020; Thurston, 2019). These factors create fertile ground for radicalization, where religious narratives are appropriated to legitimize grievances and mobilize support for violent actions.

At a broader level, the global rise of religiously motivated violence has prompted renewed scholarly interest in the relationship between religion and conflict. While some analysts emphasize the inherently divisive potential of religious absolutism, others argue that religion itself is not the root cause of violence but rather a resource that can be interpreted in multiple ways (Appleby, 2020). This dual character of religion (as both a catalyst for violence and a resource for peacebuilding) raises important questions about the role of theology in shaping human behavior. In particular, it calls attention to the need for critical theological frameworks that can confront the misuse of religion and offer alternative visions grounded in justice, compassion, and coexistence.

It is within this intellectual and practical context that Christian Theology of Liberation becomes particularly relevant. Emerging from the lived experiences of oppression and marginalization, liberation theology emphasizes the inseparability of faith and social justice, insisting that authentic religious expression must engage with the realities of suffering and inequality. Contemporary scholarship continues to highlight its enduring relevance, especially in contexts marked by systemic injustice and violence (Boff, 2020; Rowland, 2021). By foregrounding the dignity of the human person and the ethical imperative to challenge oppressive structures, liberation theology provides a framework through which religious actors can critically engage with the socio-economic and political conditions that underpin conflict.

Despite the ethical resources embedded within religious traditions, Nigeria continues to experience persistent religious violence, suggesting a disjunction between theological ideals and lived realities. The teachings of both Christianity and Islam emphasize peace, compassion, and respect for human life, yet these principles are frequently overshadowed by practices that contradict them. This contradiction points to a deeper problem: the failure to translate theological insights into concrete social and political action. As recent studies indicate, the gap between doctrine and practice is often exacerbated by weak institutional structures, inadequate religious education, and the manipulation of religious sentiments for political ends (Campbell & Page, 2021; Falola & Akinwale, 2022). On the other hand, religion becomes not a force for transformation but a tool for division and violence.

This study is therefore situated within the need to critically interrogate the role of theology in addressing contemporary forms of religious violence. It seeks to examine Christian Theology of Liberation not merely as a doctrinal construct but as a practical and analytical framework capable of engaging the root causes of religious terrorism in Nigeria. In doing so, the study explores how its core principles (justice, liberation, and solidarity with the oppressed) can be mobilized to challenge the conditions that sustain extremism. It also analyzes the dynamics of



religious terrorism within the Nigerian context, paying particular attention to its socio-economic, political, and ideological dimensions. Furthermore, the study evaluates the extent to which liberation theology can provide a viable framework for promoting peace, fostering interfaith understanding, and addressing structural inequalities.

The central questions guiding this inquiry revolve around the nature and drivers of religious terrorism in Nigeria, the conceptual and practical foundations of Christian Theology of Liberation, and the extent to which this theological tradition can contribute to mitigating religious violence. In addressing these questions, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on religion and conflict by offering a perspective that moves beyond simplistic binaries of religion as either inherently violent or inherently peaceful. Instead, it underscores the importance of interpretation, context, and praxis in determining the role religion plays in society.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between theology and social reality. By situating liberation theology within the Nigerian context, it provides insights that are both academically relevant and practically applicable. For religious leaders, it offers a framework for rethinking their role in conflict situations; for policymakers, it highlights the importance of addressing structural injustices; and for scholars, it contributes to the growing body of literature on religion, violence, and peacebuilding. At the same time, the study remains conscious of its scope and limitations. It focuses primarily on Christian theological perspectives, without undertaking a detailed comparative analysis of other religious traditions, and relies on secondary sources, which may constrain the extent of empirical generalization.

In sum, this study proceeds from the recognition that while religion has been implicated in violence, it also possesses the resources necessary for peace and transformation. The challenge, therefore, is not to abandon religion but to reinterpret and re-engage it in ways that promote justice, human dignity, and coexistence. Christian Theology of Liberation, with its emphasis on praxis and social transformation, offers a promising starting point for such an endeavor within the Nigerian context.

Conceptual Clarifications

Conceptual clarity is indispensable in any scholarly inquiry, particularly in a study that intersects theology, violence, and social transformation. The term theology, in its classical sense, refers to the disciplined and systematic study of the nature of God, religious beliefs, and the practice of faith within a given tradition. However, contemporary scholarship has moved beyond purely abstract or metaphysical formulations to emphasize theology as a contextual and interpretive enterprise. As Alister E. McGrath explains, theology involves not only reflection on divine realities but also critical engagement with human experiences in light of faith. This shift is significant because it situates theology within lived realities, making it responsive to historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts. In this sense, theology is not merely speculative but inherently practical, seeking to interpret and guide human action within the world.

Within this broader understanding emerges Christian Theology of Liberation, a theological movement that foregrounds the experience of oppression and the quest for justice as central to Christian faith. Originating in Latin America in the late twentieth century, liberation theology gained prominence through the works of Gustavo Gutiérrez, who defined it as a critical reflection on praxis in the light of the Word of God. Rather than treating theology as detached from social realities, liberation theology insists that authentic Christian faith must confront structures of injustice and align with the marginalized. This perspective was further developed in different



contexts, notably by James H. Cone, who articulated Black theology as a contextual expression of liberation theology, emphasizing the struggle against racial oppression. Central to this tradition is the notion of the “preferential option for the poor,” which underscores God’s solidarity with the oppressed and calls for active participation in their liberation. Contemporary scholars maintain that liberation theology remains relevant in addressing modern forms of inequality, violence, and exclusion (Boff, 2020; Rowland, 2021).

The concept of religious terrorism, though widely used in both academic and policy discourse, remains complex and contested. At its core, terrorism refers to the use or threat of violence by non-state actors to achieve political, ideological, or religious objectives, often targeting civilians to instill fear and coerce governments or societies. When qualified as “religious,” the term denotes acts of violence that are justified, motivated, or framed in explicitly religious terms. According to Mark Juergensmeyer, religious terrorism is distinguished not merely by its use of sacred language but by the perception of violence as a divine mandate or cosmic struggle. This framing often imbues violent acts with moral legitimacy in the eyes of perpetrators, making them more resistant to conventional deterrence strategies. However, scholars caution against attributing terrorism solely to religion, noting that such violence is typically embedded within broader socio-political and economic contexts (Juergensmeyer, 2020; Onapajo & Uzodike, 2020). In the Nigerian context, religious terrorism reflects a convergence of ideological extremism, governance challenges, and socio-economic grievances, rather than a simple outgrowth of doctrinal teachings.

The notion of a framework, as employed in this study, refers to an organized system of ideas, concepts, and assumptions that provides a basis for analysis and interpretation. In academic research, a framework serves as a lens through which a problem is examined, guiding both the structure of inquiry and the interpretation of findings. It is not merely descriptive but analytical, enabling the researcher to connect theory with empirical realities. When Christian Theology of Liberation is approached as a framework, it is understood not simply as a body of beliefs but as a structured mode of analysis that interrogates issues of injustice, power, and human suffering. It offers conceptual tools for examining the root causes of religious terrorism, particularly those related to marginalization and inequality, while also proposing ethical responses grounded in justice and human dignity. In this regard, the framework is both diagnostic and prescriptive: it seeks to explain the conditions that give rise to violence and to suggest pathways toward transformation.

Theoretical and Literature Review

The intersection between religion and violence has generated sustained scholarly debate, particularly in contexts where faith traditions are deeply embedded in social and political life. Within this discourse, two major theoretical streams are especially relevant: liberation theology and the theory of religious violence. Liberation theology, as articulated by Gustavo Gutiérrez, represents a decisive shift from abstract theological reflection to a praxis-oriented engagement with the lived realities of oppression. It conceives theology as a critical reflection on action in light of faith, insisting that the credibility of Christian witness is measured by its commitment to justice and the transformation of unjust social structures (Gutiérrez, 2019). This orientation is further deepened in the work of James H. Cone, who contextualizes liberation theology within the experience of racial oppression, arguing that theology must emerge from and speak to concrete historical suffering (Cone, 2020). Together, these perspectives establish a framework in which

religious thought is inseparable from social responsibility, emphasizing the dignity of the human person and the moral imperative to confront systems of domination.

In contrast, the theory of religious violence, notably developed by Mark Juergensmeyer, interrogates the ways in which religious narratives are mobilized to justify acts of terror. Juergensmeyer (2020) argues that religious violence often operates within a “cosmic war” framework, where conflicts are framed as metaphysical struggles between good and evil, thereby granting moral legitimacy to otherwise indefensible acts. This perspective is particularly useful in understanding how extremist groups construct ideological justifications for violence, transforming political and socio-economic grievances into sacred obligations. However, contemporary scholars caution against reducing religious terrorism to purely theological motivations, emphasizing instead the interplay of structural conditions such as marginalization, weak governance, and economic deprivation (Kessler & Arkush, 2021). The integration of these theoretical perspectives provides a robust analytical lens for this study: while liberation theology offers a normative and transformative framework grounded in justice, the theory of religious violence provides explanatory tools for understanding the persistence and dynamics of terrorism.

Anchored in these frameworks, this study adopts a dual analytical approach. First, it employs liberation theology as a critical lens to interrogate the socio-economic and political conditions that foster religious extremism, particularly in contexts marked by inequality and exclusion. By emphasizing the “preferential option for the poor,” the framework directs attention to structural injustices that often underlie radicalization processes. Second, it utilizes the theory of religious violence to analyze how religious symbols, narratives, and doctrines are appropriated to legitimize violence. The application of this combined framework allows for a more nuanced understanding of religious terrorism, not merely as an ideological aberration but as a phenomenon rooted in both material conditions and symbolic constructions. In practical terms, this approach highlights the potential of liberation theology to counter extremist narratives by reasserting ethical interpretations of faith that prioritize peace, justice, and human dignity, while also addressing the socio-economic grievances that fuel violence.

Empirical studies further illuminate the complexity of religious terrorism, particularly within the Nigerian context. Research on Boko Haram demonstrates that its emergence and persistence cannot be explained solely by religious ideology but must be understood in relation to governance failures, economic marginalization, and regional disparities (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2020; Thurston, 2019). Globally, studies on religion and violence similarly underscore the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon, pointing to the role of identity politics, geopolitical tensions, and historical grievances in shaping patterns of conflict (Appleby, 2020; Juergensmeyer, 2020). At the same time, a growing body of literature highlights the positive role of religion in peacebuilding and social transformation, particularly through frameworks such as liberation theology, which emphasize justice-oriented praxis and community empowerment (Boff, 2020; Rowland, 2021).

Despite these contributions, a significant gap remains in the literature. While numerous studies have examined the causes and dynamics of religious terrorism, relatively few have explored the practical application of theological frameworks, particularly liberation theology, as tools for addressing such violence within specific contexts like Nigeria. Existing works often treat theology and terrorism as separate domains, with limited effort to integrate normative theological insights into empirical analyses of conflict. This study seeks to bridge that gap by demonstrating

how Christian Theology of Liberation can function not only as a theoretical construct but also as a practical framework for engaging the root causes of religious terrorism and promoting sustainable peace.

Religious Terrorism in Nigeria: Trends and Dynamics

Religious terrorism in Nigeria is best understood as a historically layered and dynamically evolving phenomenon rather than a sudden eruption of violence. Earlier forms of religious conflict (such as the Maitatsine uprisings of the 1980s) were largely localized and driven by doctrinal dissent and socio-economic grievances. In contrast, the contemporary phase, marked by the rise of Boko Haram, reflects a more organized, ideologically coherent, and transnationally connected form of violence. Scholars note that this shift corresponds with broader global patterns in which religious movements increasingly intersect with political instability and weak governance structures (Thurston, 2019; Onapajo & Uzodike, 2020). The group's trajectory (from a fringe sect to a major insurgent force) demonstrates how local grievances can be reframed within a broader ideological narrative that legitimizes sustained violence.

The nature and patterns of violence associated with religious terrorism in Nigeria reveal deliberate strategic choices rather than random acts. Attacks are often symbolic, targeting places of worship, educational institutions, and state infrastructure to maximize psychological impact and undermine public confidence in government authority. This aligns with the analytical framework proposed by Mark Juergensmeyer, who argues that religious terrorism frequently operates within a "cosmic war" narrative, where violence is perceived as divinely sanctioned (Juergensmeyer, 2020). Over time, these patterns have evolved to include kidnappings, territorial control, and asymmetric warfare, indicating a shift from sporadic terrorism to a hybrid insurgency model. The socio-political and economic implications are extensive, ranging from mass displacement and humanitarian crises to disruptions in education, agriculture, and regional trade (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Poverty and economic marginalization constitute one of the most consistently identified drivers of religious terrorism in Nigeria. The concentration of poverty in the northern regions, coupled with limited access to education and employment opportunities, creates conditions in which extremist groups can thrive. Empirical evidence suggests that such groups exploit economic vulnerability by offering financial incentives and a sense of purpose to disenfranchised youth (World Bank, 2020). From a theoretical standpoint, this reflects structural explanations of conflict, which emphasize how systemic inequality fosters resentment and increases susceptibility to radicalization.

Religious intolerance and exclusivism further intensify the problem by creating rigid identity boundaries that discourage coexistence. In Nigeria's multi-religious context, extremist ideologies often frame alternative beliefs as existential threats, thereby justifying violence as a form of defense or purification. This dynamic resonates with Juergensmeyer's argument that absolutist religious identities reduce the possibility of compromise and escalate conflict (Juergensmeyer, 2020). The persistence of such exclusivist narratives undermines interfaith dialogue and reinforces cycles of mistrust and retaliation.

Political manipulation of religion represents another critical factor. Political elites frequently instrumentalize religious identities to mobilize support, particularly during elections, thereby deepening sectarian divisions. This politicization not only legitimizes extremist rhetoric but also diverts attention from governance failures, allowing structural problems to persist (Kukah,



2020). In this context, religion becomes less a source of moral guidance and more a tool for political competition and control.

Religious fanaticism, characterized by uncritical adherence to extremist interpretations, plays a central role in sustaining violence. Leaders of terrorist groups often reinterpret sacred texts to legitimize their actions, creating closed ideological systems resistant to external critique. This form of radicalization is particularly potent in environments where alternative theological perspectives are weak or inaccessible.

Finally, weak institutional structures significantly exacerbate the problem. Inadequate security systems, corrupt governance, and limited state presence in rural areas create spaces in which terrorist groups can operate with relative impunity. The inability of the state to provide basic services and ensure security erodes public trust and reinforces the appeal of non-state actors (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Christian Liberation Theology as a Framework for Addressing Religious Terrorism

Christian liberation theology offers a compelling and praxis-oriented framework for addressing religious terrorism by shifting the focus from purely security-based responses to the transformation of the underlying conditions that sustain violence. At its core, liberation theology (developed by Gustavo Gutiérrez and further expanded by James H. Cone) understands theology as a critical reflection on lived experience, particularly the experience of oppression. It insists that faith must be expressed through active engagement with injustice, thereby making social transformation an essential dimension of religious practice (Gutiérrez, 2019; Cone, 2020). When applied to the Nigerian context, this framework provides a pathway for addressing the structural and ideological drivers of religious terrorism.

One of the primary contributions of liberation theology lies in its emphasis on social justice, particularly its focus on structural inequality. By foregrounding the “preferential option for the poor,” the framework directs attention to the socio-economic conditions (poverty, unemployment, and marginalization) that create fertile ground for radicalization. Rather than treating terrorism solely as a security threat, liberation theology interprets it as a symptom of deeper systemic failures. In practical terms, this approach calls for policies and interventions that promote equitable resource distribution, access to education, and inclusive governance. Empirical studies support this linkage, demonstrating that reducing inequality and improving social welfare can significantly diminish the appeal of extremist movements (World Bank, 2020; Boff, 2020). Thus, liberation theology works by addressing the root causes of violence rather than merely its manifestations.

Closely related to this is the framework’s commitment to non-violence as both an ethical principle and a practical strategy. Liberation theology challenges interpretations of religion that legitimize violence by reasserting the centrality of peace, justice, and human dignity within Christian teaching. In doing so, it provides a counter-narrative to extremist ideologies that frame violence as divinely sanctioned. This is particularly important in light of the insights of Mark Juergensmeyer, who notes that religious terrorism often draws legitimacy from sacred narratives that depict conflict as a cosmic struggle (Juergensmeyer, 2020). Liberation theology disrupts this narrative by emphasizing reconciliation, forgiveness, and restorative justice, thereby delegitimizing violence at the level of belief systems.

The framework also advances a robust understanding of human freedom, which is central to reducing the grievances that fuel terrorism. Liberation theology conceives freedom not merely



as the absence of oppression but as the presence of conditions that enable individuals to realize their full potential. This includes access to education, political participation, and economic opportunity. By advocating for these conditions, the framework addresses the sense of exclusion and injustice that often drives individuals toward extremist groups. In this sense, liberation theology operates preventively, reducing the likelihood of radicalization by fostering environments in which individuals feel valued and empowered.

The role of the Church and other religious institutions is crucial in operationalizing this framework. Liberation theology envisions the Church as an active agent of social change, responsible for teaching, advocacy, and peacebuilding. Through preaching, theological education, and community engagement, religious institutions can challenge extremist interpretations of faith and promote messages of tolerance and coexistence. Additionally, churches can engage in advocacy efforts aimed at influencing public policy, particularly in areas related to social justice and human rights (Rowland, 2021). Peacebuilding initiatives, such as community dialogue and conflict resolution programs, further translate theological principles into concrete actions that mitigate violence.

Interfaith dialogue represents another critical mechanism through which liberation theology addresses religious terrorism. In a pluralistic society like Nigeria, sustainable peace requires the cultivation of mutual understanding and respect among different religious communities. Liberation theology supports this by promoting an inclusive vision of faith that recognizes the dignity of all individuals, regardless of religious affiliation. Interfaith initiatives (such as joint community projects, dialogue forums, and educational programs) help to break down stereotypes, reduce mistrust, and build social cohesion. Empirical evidence indicates that such initiatives can significantly reduce the likelihood of interreligious conflict and contribute to long-term peace (Appleby, 2020).

As a corollary, Christian liberation theology works as a framework for addressing religious terrorism by integrating ethical reflection with practical action. It tackles structural inequality, counters violent ideologies, promotes human freedom, mobilizes religious institutions, and fosters interfaith coexistence. By addressing both the material and ideological dimensions of terrorism, it offers a comprehensive and sustainable approach to reducing religious violence.

Evaluation of Liberation Theology in the Nigerian Context

Christian liberation theology provides a morally compelling and socially engaged framework for addressing injustice, yet its application within the Nigerian context requires careful evaluation. As developed by Gustavo Gutiérrez and extended by James H. Cone, the framework is rooted in a deep concern for the oppressed and insists on the inseparability of faith and social transformation. One of its major strengths lies in its capacity to reframe religious engagement with violence by shifting attention from symptoms to underlying structural conditions. In Nigeria, where poverty, inequality, and political exclusion remain pervasive, this emphasis is particularly relevant. By foregrounding the “preferential option for the poor,” liberation theology provides a normative basis for addressing the socio-economic grievances that often contribute to radicalization. Empirical studies affirm that structural inequalities and marginalization are significant drivers of conflict, thereby reinforcing the framework’s analytical value (World Bank, 2020; Boff, 2020).

Another strength of the framework is its ethical insistence on non-violence and human dignity. In a context where religious narratives are sometimes manipulated to justify violence,



liberation theology offers a counter-interpretation that prioritizes peace, justice, and reconciliation. This is especially important when considered alongside the insights of Mark Juergensmeyer, who highlights how extremist movements often sacralize violence through “cosmic war” narratives (Juergensmeyer, 2020). Liberation theology disrupts such narratives by reasserting the moral core of religious teaching and encouraging critical theological reflection. Additionally, its emphasis on praxis (linking belief to action) positions religious institutions as active agents in peacebuilding, advocacy, and community development. This practical orientation enhances its relevance in addressing real-world challenges, particularly in fragile and conflict-prone societies.

Despite these strengths, liberation theology has been subject to significant criticisms, particularly regarding its perceived over-idealism. Critics argue that the framework often assumes that structural transformation and ethical reorientation can be achieved through moral persuasion and grassroots mobilization, without sufficiently accounting for entrenched political interests and power dynamics (Rowland, 2021). In the Nigerian context, where corruption, elite capture, and weak governance structures persist, such assumptions may appear overly optimistic. The complexity of religious terrorism (shaped by transnational networks, ideological indoctrination, and security challenges) raises questions about whether a primarily theological framework can adequately address such multifaceted threats.

Contextual challenges further complicate the application of liberation theology in Nigeria. Unlike its Latin American origins, where it emerged within predominantly Christian societies, Nigeria is characterized by deep religious pluralism, with significant Muslim and Christian populations. This raises concerns about the exclusivity of a Christian-based framework in addressing a problem that cuts across religious boundaries. While the principles of justice and human dignity are broadly applicable, the explicitly Christian orientation of liberation theology may limit its acceptance in non-Christian communities, thereby constraining its effectiveness as a unifying framework. Moreover, variations in theological interpretation within Christianity itself can lead to divergent applications, reducing coherence in practice.

Practical constraints also pose significant limitations. The implementation of liberation theology requires strong institutional capacity, sustained advocacy, and grassroots engagement; conditions that are often lacking in many parts of Nigeria. Religious institutions, while influential, may themselves be constrained by internal divisions, limited resources, or political pressures. Furthermore, the immediate demands of security and counterterrorism often prioritize military and intelligence-based approaches, leaving little room for long-term, justice-oriented strategies. This tension between short-term security measures and long-term structural transformation underscores a key limitation of the framework in practice.

Generally, while liberation theology offers a rich and ethically grounded approach to addressing religious terrorism, its effectiveness in Nigeria is shaped by a range of structural, contextual, and practical factors. Its strengths lie in its focus on justice, non-violence, and social transformation, but its limitations (particularly in terms of over-idealism, contextual applicability, and implementation challenges) highlight the need for a more integrated approach that combines theological insight with political, economic, and security strategies.



Recommendations

In light of the foregoing analysis, the following recommendations are proposed;

- There is a need to integrate social justice-oriented policies into national counterterrorism strategies, ensuring that efforts to combat religious violence go beyond military responses to address poverty, inequality, and marginalization that often drive radicalization.
- Government at all levels should prioritize inclusive economic development, particularly in Northern Nigeria, by expanding access to education, vocational training, and employment opportunities as a preventive measure against extremist recruitment.
- Religious leaders and institutions should deliberately promote non-violent theological interpretations that emphasize peace, justice, and human dignity, thereby countering extremist ideologies that misuse religion to justify violence.
- Churches and faith-based organizations should strengthen their roles in advocacy and community engagement, actively addressing social injustices and supporting vulnerable populations in ways that reduce grievances.
- Interfaith dialogue initiatives should be institutionalized and sustained, bringing together Christian and Muslim leaders to foster mutual understanding, reduce suspicion, and build long-term coexistence.
- Government and civil society organizations should collaborate to regulate and monitor religious teachings, ensuring that hate speech and extremist indoctrination are identified and addressed early.
- Educational curricula, both secular and religious, should incorporate peace education, critical thinking, and civic responsibility to reduce susceptibility to radicalization among young people.
- Strengthening institutional capacity (particularly in security, justice, and governance) is essential to restoring public trust and ensuring that the state can effectively respond to and prevent acts of terrorism.
- Community-based peacebuilding programs should be expanded, empowering local actors to mediate conflicts, support victims, and promote reconciliation at the grassroots level.
- A multidisciplinary approach should be adopted, combining theological frameworks such as liberation theology with political, economic, and security strategies to create a more holistic and sustainable response to religious terrorism in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Religious terrorism in Nigeria cannot be adequately understood or effectively addressed through narrow, security-driven approaches alone. As this study has shown, the phenomenon is deeply embedded in a complex web of structural inequality, political manipulation, institutional weakness, and distorted religious narratives. The persistence of groups such as Boko Haram underscores the limitations of conventional counterterrorism strategies that prioritize force over transformation. What emerges instead is the necessity for a more holistic framework; one that engages both the material and moral dimensions of the crisis.



Christian liberation theology, as developed by Gustavo Gutiérrez and James H. Cone, offers such a framework. By insisting that faith must confront injustice in concrete terms, it redirects attention to the root causes of violence (poverty, exclusion, and systemic neglect) while simultaneously challenging the ideological distortions that legitimize terror. Its emphasis on justice, human dignity, and non-violence provides not only a moral critique of religious extremism but also a practical pathway for social transformation. In this sense, liberation theology does not merely interpret the crisis; it calls for deliberate action to reshape the conditions that sustain it.

At the same time, this study has recognized that liberation theology is not without its limitations. Its application within Nigeria's pluralistic and politically complex environment requires adaptation, dialogue, and integration with broader policy and security frameworks. The realities of governance deficits, religious diversity, and entrenched power structures mean that no single framework can offer a complete solution. However, this does not diminish its value. Rather, it highlights the need to position liberation theology as part of a wider, interdisciplinary response one that brings together theology, public policy, economic reform, and peacebuilding initiatives.

Therefore, the strength of this approach lies in its capacity to rehumanize both the victims and perpetrators of violence by addressing the conditions that shape their realities. It challenges religious communities, policymakers, and society at large to move beyond reactive measures toward proactive engagement with justice and reconciliation. If meaningfully applied, this framework holds the potential not only to reduce religious terrorism but also to foster a more just, inclusive, and peaceful Nigerian society.

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