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Christian Churches and the Boko Haram Insurgency in Cameroon: Dilemmas and Responses

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Abstract: The spillover of the terrorist activities of Boko Haram, a Nigerian jihadi group, into Cameroon's northern region has resulted in security challenges and humanitarian activity opportunities for Christian churches. The insurgents have attacked and destroyed churches, abducted Christians, worsened Muslim-Christian relations, and caused a humanitarian crisis. Aggregately, these ensuing phenomena have adversely affected Christian churches in this region, triggering an aura of responses: coping strategies, humanitarian work among refugees, and inter-faith dialogue. These responses are predicated on Christianity's potential as a resource for peace, compassion, and love. In this study we emphasize the role of Christian churches in dealing with the Boko Haram insurgency. It opens up with a contextualization of Boko Haram in Cameroon's north. This is followed by an examination of the brutality meted out on Christians and church property. The final section is an examination of the spiritual, humanitarian and relief services provided by Christian churches. The paper argues that although Christian churches have suffered at the hands of *Boko Haram* insurgents, they have engaged in various beneficial responses underpinned by the Christian values of peace and love.

Keywords: Cameroon; terrorism; religion; Islam; *Boko Haram*; Christian churches; peace

1. Introduction

There is a consensus agreement in the huge available literature that all religions have within the practices ensuing from their foundational beliefs both violent and peaceful tendencies (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana 2009; Chapman 2007; Fox 1999). In well-established global religions such as Christianity and Islam, there exist ideologies and doctrines that are so diverse and complex that justification for both violence and peace can be found within their traditions. It is for this reason that virtually all religions have at different times and places been associated either with conflict or peace. In his *Terror in the Mind of God*, Mark Juergensmeyer (2003) argues that all global religions have had a violent perspective. Clearly, therefore, religion, violence and peace have been natural companions throughout human history. But for some time now, the coursing of militant Islamism in the hands of minority extremists in the name of Islam has grown, with no continent left untouched. Surely, this Islamic militancy, as should be expected, has left the affected people (Muslims and non-Muslims) shocked, angry and uncomprehending. As Esposito notes, Islamic terrorism builds on the fact that Islam emphasizes action given that Muslims are enjoined "to struggle (jihad) to implement their belief, to lead a good life, to defend religion, to contribute to the development of a just Islamic society throughout the world." (Esposito 2002, p. 5). In this present context of Muslim extremism and ensuing terrorism, the word jihad is used by terrorist movements such as Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Islamic State, and the like to legitimate their cause and motivate their followers.

With its historical roots traced to 2002 and fed along by frustration on account of political, economic, social and religious issues, the Boko Haram insurgency became a threatening episode from 2009, with civilian casualties, fear and material damages heightening tremendously. By the time the terrorist acts of the sect began spilling over into neighbouring Cameroon, its scope of operation had gone beyond the easy civilian targets including government institutions especially police and military establishments. But given that the terrorist movement is partly couched in religious terms, as its leaders claim, Christians and Muslims were targeted in churches and mosques through suicide bombings, direct attacks by armed insurgents, kidnappings and the like. Indeed, its declared religious agenda was/is to establish a pure Islamic state across West Africa governed under the Sharia Law (Asfura-Heim & MaQuaid 2015). This is indicative that Christianity together with its faithful and property was under attack. It is important to stress that the victimization of Christian organizations by perpetrators of terrorism is not a new phenomenon. In fact, since the rise and spread of *Boko Haram* into Cameroon, churches, their clergy and faithful have suffered at the hands of insurgents. They have been targeted through suicide bombings, gun attacks, kidnappings, rape and the like.

This openly declared religious agenda along with the growth and spread of the cataclysmic activities of the movement in Cameroon, just like in Nigeria, Niger and Chad, was an issue that could not be allowed to run its course unperturbed. Without doubt, the *Boko Haram* insurgency was/is threatening Cameroon's peace, and required a committed engagement in its management. As the Cameroon Government fully embraced its responsibility of protecting the citizenry by deploying the military to curb the insurgence, it soon became obvious that the military approach was hugely inappropriate, given that the group has no clear command structure and a known regular force. Consequently, a holistic proactive peace approach became necessary and the greatly affected Christian Church was required to come on board. In fact, tapping from Christianity's potential to respond to the *Boko Haram* insurgency became indispensable. This is perhaps why in his *Christian Response to Islam, Islamism and 'Islamic Terrorism'*, Chapman (2007) calls for a cautious Christian response to the terror orchestrated in the name of Islam. Good enough, *Boko Haram's* multiple assaults on Christian life and property in the north of Cameroon quickly served as a basis for Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal churches to consider the vocation of peace as a response.

So, besides being targets, the Christian clergy have played a role in responding to the terrorism carried out by *Boko Haram* as educators, advocates, humanitarians, etc. Building on scriptural texts, they do what might be likened to what Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana (2009) describe as changing behaviours, attitudes, negative stereotypes, healing trauma among others. In fact, there is consensus in the literature that the Christian faith, just like other religions, is replete with resources that may influence the effectiveness of any conflict management and resolution effort. But so far scholars have not given the required attention to the imprint of the *Boko Haram* insurgency on the Christian church in north Cameroon. The churches' response to the brutality of the militant Islamic group is equally marginalized in available scholarship. Rather attention has been received by the origins, development, mutations, and implications of *Boko Haram* activities along with the international struggle against the insurgency. This paucity of literature on how the *Boko Haram* brutality relates to the Christian churches necessitated this study. In this light, this article examines how the *Boko Haram* insurgency has affected Christian churches in Cameroon along with their responses to the intolerance.

2. Contextualizing Boko Haram Militant Islamism in Cameroon

The militant Islamism of the *Boko Haram* terrorist movement has connections with the jihad tradition which characterized the Islamization of West and Central African societies in the nineteenth century. The Sokoto Caliphate and its affiliate, the Adamawa Emirate, were products of the Islamic revolutions that were led by Muslim reformers such as Uthman Dan Fodio and Modibbo Adama (Adama 2010). These Islamically-legitimated states covered parts of modern-day Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Other jihads were led by reformers such as Al-Hajj Umar al-Tall and Seku Ahmadou. This jihadi precedence, in part, can explain the militant Islamism currently roiling some West and Central African states. In fact the development of *Boko Haram* cannot be dissociated from the long traditions of militant jihad in West and Central Africa. *Boko Haram* and the early jihad movements had an exclusivist approach. This exclusivism demands that Muslims choose between Islam and what Thurston describes as “a set of allegedly anti-Islamic practices.” (Thurston 2016, p. 5). In the thinking of Voll, *Boko Haram*’s militant Islamism is not just a “continuation of older religious militancy”, but is also a “product of contemporary Muslim radical beliefs identified as Salafism.” (Voll 2015, p. 1185). Just like the nineteenth century jihads, *Boko Haram* is opposed to the pollution of “pure” Islam. But to this should be added the modern societal mutations to which *Boko Haram* is opposed. Hence, in spite probably drawing inspiration from the jihadi legacy of Uthman Dan Fodio, *Boko Haram* represents the modern dimension of religious terrorism at the centre of which is Islam.

So, the *Boko Haram* insurgency which has spilled over into Cameroon, in some respect, is indicative of Islam’s intertwining with violence. Although the goals of the militant group are undeniably ambiguous, the violence and bloodshed it has perpetuated make clear the complex interactions between the Muslim extremist group and conflict (Azumah 2014, p. 4; Blanchard 2016). In the northern part of Cameroon, the relationship between Islam and violence is not unique to the current *Boko Haram* insurgency- it has existed since the nineteenth century jihad of Modibo Adama. As a matter of fact, the jihadist legacy in Northern Cameroon dates back to the early part of this century when Modibo Adama led a Fulani insurgency against the numerous Muslim and non-Muslim communities. This is a factor not to be missed when contextualizing the spillover of *Boko Haram* militancy into this Muslim-dominated part of Cameroon. In fact, the nineteenth century jihad amounted to the birth of the Adamawa Emirate, a Muslim theocratic state that was governed along Islamic lines. This did not only mark the beginning of the dominance of the Islamic faith in this region, but represented a precedence of an Islamic faith that functions as an identity-forming mechanism with the capacity to construct and mobilize individuals and groups, both to violence as well as to peace. The nineteenth century jihad was the beginning of a period of pacifism, making the potential of violence a part of Islam’s symbolic system, no matter its proclamation of peace and nonviolence. In his introduction to *Belief and Bloodshed*, James K. Wellman provides a working definition of religion which among other things stresses that “The symbolic and social boundaries of religion mobilize individual and group identity, and create conflict and, more rarely, violence within and between groups.” (Wellman 2017, p. 4).

Seen this way, it is clear that fundamentalism whose outcome is violence became a defining factor of Islam in Cameroon and across West and Central Africa in places where the jihads were successful. Since then, religiously inspired violence which today has gained a militant extremist

dimension has characterized the historical development of Islam in Northern Cameroon. In pre-colonial north Cameroon and Nigeria, forceful conversion to Islam dragged on up to the eve of colonialism. It was a period when followers of Traditional Religion were targets of Islamic violence. As Njeuma observes, Fulbe Muslims insisted that Islam offered a superior God to whom all must submit, and that obedience to Allah's Messenger was obligatory (Njeuma 2000, p. 12). Indeed the Jihad marked the first major religious conflict in pre-colonial Cameroon given that Muslims and Non Muslims fought hard to safeguard their faith tradition. But the advanced military technologies which characterized this Muslim religious militancy caused the defeat of many people with whole communities converted to an exclusivist version of Islam (Njeuma 1978, p. 8).

The Adamawa Emirate which accrued from this jihad came under German rule in the 1890s. But the Germans maintained the old order through indirect rule and gave official recognition and protection to Islam's influence in the north. This served as a barrier for Christian missionaries to extend their activities into the north, making the Cameroonian territory to be arguably divided into the Christian South and Muslim North (Adama 2006, p. 47; Lang 2015, p. 60). The French who succeeded the Germans after World War One hesitatingly allowed Christian missionaries to plant Christianity in the area amid Muslim suspicion. Since then, the religious landscape of the region has been characterized by intolerance and divisiveness (Schilder 1993, p. 45). In fact, the path to Muslim-Christian cohabitation in north Cameroon is littered with intolerance, given that both faiths have a universal message. Without doubt, both religions have their accepted dogma that followers must accept without question. Besides, as earlier pointed out, both religions have the potential to trigger violence. This has sadly been an unavoidable feature of the history of Islam and Christianity in north Cameroon. With this proneness to religious violence running its course in north Cameroon, the global phenomenon of modern Islamic movements emerged as a driving force behind the resurgence of Islam (Esposito 2002, p. 84).

This among other things was fed by Muslims' rich legacy of traditions that require them to reform their societies in every age (Fonge 2015, p. 24). The nineteenth century jihads in West Africa should be understood in this context. But towards the close of the twentieth century, this reform came in transformed ways marked by the proliferation of terrorist Islamic movements. The *Boko Haram* is one of such movements. The birth place of this movement, Nigeria has a proven fertile ground in which the seeds of religious violence and terrorism thrived. According to Adesoji, the gradual rise of *Boko Haram* represented an attempt by Islamic conservative elements at imposing a variant of "Islamic religious ideology". (Adesoji 2010, p. 95). Although the movement's target was initially Nigeria, it soon developed a regional ambition, striving to create an Islamic state in West Africa. The religious sensitivity of Muslims in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger provided fertile ground for the breeding of the *Boko Haram* sect (Onuoha 2014). With such a religious ambition, the spillover of *Boko Haram* into neighbouring Cameroon was expected. There was/is an extraordinary commitment of the insurgents to the course of Islamic revivalism.

Given that there was a jihadi precedence in Cameroon, the Christian population and moderate Muslims became targets of the insurgents. Since 2013, the sectarian insurgency has wrecked immense havoc in Cameroon, especially by kidnapping Christians, suicide bombings, gun attacks, destruction of churches with cataclysmic consequences. These dilemmas that are threatening the survival of Christianity in the northern part of Cameroon resulted in Christian responses to the terrorist activities of *Boko Haram*. In spite its political and economic goals, *Boko Haram* can be

described as an Islamic sect that believes corrupt, false Muslims and Christians control areas where reformed Islam is supposed to thrive. The group, among other things, wants to establish an Islamic state covering parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad with strict adherence to Sharia Law. Originally, the group calls itself *ama'atu Ahlis Sunnar Lidda'avati Wal-Jihad*, which broadly translates to "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad." In January 2012, Abubakar Shakau appeared in a video posted on You Tube in which he stated that "Boko Haram is at war with Christians." (Mark 2012). This has made Christians in north Cameroon targets of the Islamic sect. In addition to the mainline churches (Catholics and Protestants) that are having a strong base in the north, Christian revivalists have penetrated the area in ways that are changing its religious landscape, with a potential to amount to intolerance. More still, the Muslim community is divided as the traditional Sufi Islam is increasingly challenged by the rise of more rigorist Islamic ideology, mostly Wahhabism (International Crisis Group 2015).

Hence, *Boko Haram* with its radical Islamic ideology spilled into Cameroon at a time when there was intolerance resulting from competition within Islam and Christianity and broadly between the two religions. In its program report No. 229 of September 2015, the International Crisis Group states that "the religious groups in Cameroon have negative perceptions of each other." (International Crisis Group 2015). So, *Boko Haram*, irrespective of having its base in Nigeria, represents one of such intolerant religious movements radicalizing Cameroon's religious landscape. As Ogochukwu notes, the group "considers whether Christian or Muslim an infidel if such a person does not adhere to strictly to its principle." (Ogochukwu 2013, p. 5). While acknowledging how difficult it is to define and understand *Boko Haram*, Walker agrees that it has a radical religious agenda, as he labels it as "an Islamic millenarianist sect inspired by a heretical but charismatic leader." (Walker 2012, p. 1). Little wonder *Boko Haram* does not only export violence to Cameroon, but also its religious rhetoric which has made other Muslims and Christians targets of extremism.

3. *Boko Haram*: A Dilemma for the Christian Church

As an extremist Islamic sect, *Boko Haram* has since 2013 created havoc among Christians and Muslims in the North of Cameroon. It is very difficult not to accept that one of the motivations of the Muslim extremists who carried out violence in Cameroon was/is theological. Writing for the Oxford Research Group, Reeve notes that the Salafist commitment of *Boko Haram* leaders is real (Reeve 2014, p. 3). Their attacks on Christians and church property could be indicative that the country is on the brink of a religious war. Earlier in 2012, Abubakar Shakau stressed that *Boko Haram* was at war with Christians. He told Christians that "The religion of Christianity you are practicing is not a religion of God – it is paganism....We are trying to coerce you to embrace Islam, because that is what God instructed us to do." (Shkau 2012). In its numerous operations in the north, the group has always left behind sad stories and scary scenes of destruction, death and kidnappings among Christians. For close to three years now, *Boko Haram* insurgents have orchestrated indiscriminate terrorist violence on the Christian church. This circle of asymmetric violence against Christians has often resulted in cataclysmic outcomes.

The group began kidnapping Christian missionaries stationed in that part of Cameroon, making it clear that further Christianization of north Cameroon was a difficult task. In November 2013, a French Priest, Georges Vandenbeusch was abducted by armed militants of this sect. In April 2014, more abductions followed when other Christian clerics were kidnapped (Guibbaud 2014, p. 2).

These clerics who comprised two Italian priests and a Canadian nun were kidnapped in the far north town of Tthere. In the town of Mora, Catholic and Protestant Christian leaders were forced by surprised attacks to cancel Sunday services and other important religious events such as Christmas and New Year vigils in December 2014. In fact, Christian worship places in the town were closed in the last months of 2014 when the asymmetric violence heightened. The General Secretary of the German-based Baptist Mission Agency, Christoph Haus, reported to the Baptist World Alliance that Christians and missionaries had been kidnapped by the group. He explained how the Islamists attacked and destroyed some Baptist churches at the border with Nigeria. It was this vicious circle of violence on Christians and church property that caused the German-based Baptist Mission Agency to evacuate its missionaries from Cameroon.

Still in 2014, Christian populations were particularly targeted. This is particularly true of the village of Cherif Moussary, where a church was ransacked and the residence of the pastor burned down. Many Christian families were stripped of their properties, according to a World Watch Monitor report. There were similar acts of desecration in Mouldougoua and Assighassia. The latter was occupied in August for days by Boko Haram militants before being ousted by the army. Regrettably, Zerubbabel Tchamaya and Samuel Lada, elders of this church were beheaded during the occupation. In Djibrilli village, a pastor was kidnapped, threatened and asked about his faith by militants before being released the following day (Djadi 2014). Overall, the assailants attacked in the night, when the army was no longer patrolling in the villages. They entered the houses of Christians and stripped them of their properties. In most occasions, the churches that came under attack were ransacked and valuables such as musical instruments were destroyed or taken away by the extremists. These strident Boko Haram messages and extreme violence against Christians, in spite that more Muslims have been targeted than Christians, aggravate Muslim-Christian relations in Cameroon's north (Thurston 2016, p. 22).

On 28 July 2015, Members of *Boko Haram* attacked two villages in northern Cameroon and burned down a Catholic church, according to a report published by *Agence France-Presse*. During this attack, the jihadists beheaded three villagers. Later in October 2015, armed gunmen attacked another church in a small village outside Mora, causing many Christians to flee. Sadly, the attack resulted in the death of eight Christians and the complete destruction of the church building. The recent approach adopted by *Boko Haram* is that of sending suicide bombers to destroy churches and kill Christians. This demonstrates the harassment, intimidation and violence Christians face at the hands of these extremists in the parts of north Cameroon affected by the insurgence. It is for this reason that some of the churches have pulled out their missionaries from these areas in order to avoid kidnappings and violent attacks. The extremism is also demonstrative why some Christians have fled from the land of their birth, taking refuge in other towns and in refugee camps. In addition to this, some Christians of southern extraction who were posted to work in areas that have been visited by terrorist activities carried out by *Boko Haram* are doing everything possible to be transferred to other parts of the country.

Worth noting is the fact that the *Boko Haram* extremism against Christians and Muslims as well is a clear transgression of the religious freedom clauses enshrined in the constitution of Cameroon. Since 2013, many Christians have been denied the core principle of freedom of worship in some parts of north Cameroon. Although statistics are hard to come by, the Christian population in areas frequently attacked by the insurgents such as Fotokol, Mora and the like has rolled back. While some

have been killed and abducted, others have escaped to safe zones. The pressure is even higher especially on Christians from a Muslim background who have chosen to become Christians. So, any objective analysis of *Boko Haram* insurgency would recognize the anti-Christian dimension of the jihadi group. The British-based Christian Institute blamed *Boko Haram* for killing nearly 4,000 people in 2014, most of whom were Christians (Christian Institute 2015). Without doubt, there is a heightened level of fear for Christians in Cameroon's north, especially close to the border with Nigeria. This unprecedented extremism against Christians has necessitated a Christian response, which has taken numerous dimensions.

4. Christian Responses to the Boko Haram Extremism

Down the centuries, as Azumah observes, Christians have had a polarized response to Islamic extremism (Azumah 2010, p. 83). While some Christians have opted for a tough response as was the case during the crusades, others have preferred a soft or conciliatory one. Broadly, Christian response to Islam has changed over time, given that the medieval period was marked by a confrontational Christian anti-Islamic polemic as opposed to the more conciliatory and openness mechanisms of the contemporary period (Kate 1995, p. 6). In the wake of the spillover of the *Boko Haram* insurgency into Cameroon, Christian churches (Catholics, Protestants and Pentecostals) have responded in various ways. As earlier noted, the extremism came at a time when Cameroon's religious landscape was already on the path to radicalism (International Crisis Group 2015). This section critiques how the Christian community in Cameroon has responded to the militant and violent face of Islam, represented here by the *Boko Haram* terrorist movement.

In Cameroon, the current Islamic militancy has emerged as a determinant factor for Christian responses to Islam. This, as already noted, accrues from the trauma of the *Boko Haram* attacks along with its huge psychological and evangelical impact on the Christian church. Initially the operation of the *Boko Haram* was not given a serious attention by the Christian community. The reason is premised on the assumption that *Boko Haram*, in spite its extremism against Christians, was a Nigerian sect, with nothing to do with Cameroon. This flawed assumption caused the Christian clergy to do nothing to monitor the dynamics of the extremism as to locate early warning signs to foresee its spillover into Cameroon. In 2013 and 2014 when the first Christian clergy were abducted, the Christian faithful in the north came to understand that the sect was a huge threat to their faith tradition. It was this wave of abductions and successive attacks on Christians and church buildings that triggered the first reactions from the Christian clerics. In conformity with Paul's call in Romans 13, Christians manifested undoubted patriotism in ways that did not compromise their prophetic calling. When these clerics were under detention, Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal churches organized prayers calling on God to facilitate their release. The Cameroon National Episcopal Conference issued a statement urging *Boko Haram* to enter into dialogue with the Cameroon government for the release of abducted clerics. At the same time, the retired Archbishop of Douala, Christian Cardinal Tumi, stressed the need for dialogue, observing that "Our message to those who still hold our brothers in captivity is that they should release them and hold dialogue."

Interestingly, Christians seem to have quickly understood that while *Boko Haram* Islamist insurgents use Qur'anic verses calling for violence as a theological justification for their terrorist acts, many orthodox Muslims do not agree with this way of interpreting the Qur'an. If one should go by messages from Catholic and Protestant clergy, it is evident that there is a consensus call for

Christians to be careful on their judgments about the Qur'an. Indeed, while responding to the insurgency, which has also targeted Muslims, Christians have not yielded to the temptation of telling Muslims how they should interpret the Qur'an. They have also avoided associating all Cameroonian Muslims with the *Boko Haram* radical religious ideology. In fact, the Christian community has been made to see Islam as a religion with a potential to guarantee peace, in spite its use by *Boko Haram* leaders to justify the terror running its course in Cameroon. These messages have made Christians recognize that a majority of Muslims in Cameroon are not associated with the ongoing militant Islam. Though under attack, Christians have not approved declarations that the insurgents fight and kill others in defence of Islam. Cameroonian Muslims, with the exception of the minority extremists, totally reject the use of Qur'anic verses to justify violence in the name of Islam.

In his induction sermon as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, Right Reverend Samuel Forba Fonki called on Christians to partner with the government to restore the peace and sovereignty threatened by the *Boko Haram* sect (Rt. Rev. Samuel Forba Fonki 2012, p. 6). Good enough, Cameroonian Christians have manifested the willingness to support those Muslims who are under attack because they challenge the harsher Islamist interpretations of the Qur'an. In numerous ways, Christians have sympathized with the orthodox Muslim community, while denouncing the radical ones. Writing for *L'Effort Camerounais*, Fr Gerald Nyuykongmo Jumbam describes *Boko Haram* as an "agent of terror that kills without conscience and beat, bomb and lynch unarmed civilians in the name of religion." (Jumbam 2014).

On the humanitarian front, Christian churches are making efforts to address the humanitarian crisis triggered by the *Boko Haram* insurgency. The Minawao refugee camp which hosts thousands of persons displaced by the conflict has received an aura of assistance from Christian churches. In March 2015, the National Episcopal conferences of Nigeria and Cameroon entered a partnership intended to assist refugees in this camp. Through this partnership, the Catholic Church in Cameroon receives and manages assistance from the Episcopal Conference of Nigeria destined for Nigerians who have fled to Cameroon due to the violence (Crossmap Christian News, 2015). Besides, the Council of Protestant Churches in Cameroon (CPCC) has been running food programmes in the Minawao camp where over six thousand refugees are living in deplorable conditions. In the Far North Region, the CPCC put in place a Crisis Committee in an effort to better handle the influx of Nigerian refugees. Chaired by Rev. Samuel Heteck, the Committee mobilized funds and visited the refugee camps with emergency needs capable of improving the livelihood of the displaced people. On 19 October 2015, fundraising and voluntary donation services were held in all Protestant churches in Cameroon (Crossmap Christian News, 2015). Broadly, the churches pay attention to the spiritual, physical, financial, and material needs of the refugees by ministering to them and offering food, shelter and medicines.

Regarding the spiritual domain, Christian leaders have offered prayers and invoked instructive Christian texts at critical moments when ever there was an attack. As a matter of fact, Christian teachings have inspired the clergy and their faithful in the struggle against *Boko Haram*. The churches have organized special prayer services in the hope of enhancing peace in the country. In July 2015 for instance, the Catholic Church held a Prayer for Peace Service across the country. While presiding over this service in Douala, the President of the Cameroon Episcopal Conference, Archbishop Samuel Kleda, called on the God to bless Cameroon with peace in these words: "We want to entrust Cameroon as well as all other countries in war to the Lord. The insecurity raging on our borders, in

particular those with Nigeria, has created a psychosis in our population. In these situations, you must put yourself in the hands of the Almighty."

Another area in which Christian leaders responded to the terrorist activities of *Boko Haram* was the enhancement of interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims. This resulted from the possibility of northern Cameroon becoming trapped in sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians. Initially, Christian leaders intended to break the cycle of revenge by preaching the gospel of forgiveness. This explains why they provided spiritual support to enable the affected Christians face agonizing pain and suffering. Later, the need to work together with Muslims was acknowledged by the Christian clergy. Consequently, various interreligious meetings and conferences were organized on the subject of *Boko Haram*. Quite often, these conferences have been heavily attended by Christian leaders committed to the course of checking the terrorist activities of the radical Islamic sect (International Crisis Group 2015). CPCC has organized several ecumenical services intended to enhance the cohabitation of religions in Cameroon, a preemptive measure for a radical response from Christians who have suffered from the recurrent violent attacks. In April 2014 for instance, about 40 Christian and Muslim leaders met to promote a culture of peace and tolerance between different religious communities, and this led to a Youth Forum on August 7 in Maroua. Under the theme "Young Christians and Muslims together for peace and development", it allowed local authorities to call young people to be 'an agent of intelligence' and to report any suspect activity. In their closing statement, Christian and Muslim young people expressed their commitment "to promote religious tolerance, to not give in to the bait of kidnappers and to remain faithful to the ideals of the Republic." (Djadi 2014).

The heightening of attacks by the radical Islamists and fears of the deterioration of Christian-Muslim relations caused religious leaders to organize a conference in the town of Mora on 21 January 2016. The theme of the interreligious conference, "Living in Peace in the Sight of God", is indicative that Christian and Muslim leaders were committed to the task of promoting tolerance and peace in the face of religious terrorism. The conference was co-chaired by the Sultan of Wandala, Boukar Alhaji Yerima Brahim; Rev. Gregory Cador, Episcopal Vicar of Mora; and Rev. Samuel Heteck, President of the northern Cameroon branch of the CPCC (World Watch Monitor 2016). Apart from denouncing the violence, the Sultan of Wandala saw the conference as an opportunity for Muslims and Christians to look in the same direction as a means of checking religiously-inspired terrorism. On the overall, the Muslim and Christian leaders resolved at the conference to persevere in their role as educators, by preaching love and brotherhood within families, communities and places of worship. This has eliminated the climate of fear of a religious conflict in Cameroon, as Christian clerics denied to associate Islam with the violence. Clearly, Christian-Muslim dialogue has been a proactive means of minimizing Cameroonians' adherence to *Boko Haram* through addressing ignorance and distrust. The dialogue has made Christians to better understand Islam and Muslims to have a deep understanding of Christianity.

Little wonder the Christian faithful have not yielded to the temptation of resorting to Christian Zionism as a response to the cataclysmic attacks on them by *Boko Haram*. This has so far aided the management of the terrorist crisis since it has prevented retaliatory attacks from the affected Christians in the north. The persecuted Christians in the north are yet to involve in any revengeful tactics. Christian leaders have therefore succeeded in preventing the emergence of a militant Christianity in Cameroon in the wake of the *Boko Haram* insurgency. But the presence of Pentecostals

in north Cameroon with their charismatic and radical brand of Christianity may be described as a raw material for Christian extremism. As observed by International Crisis Group in its 2015 report, Pentecostal Christian groups represent a new dimension in religious fundamentalism in contemporary Cameroon. They may reflect a negative attitude toward Islam, just like *Boko Haram*. However, the latter has already been demonized by Pentecostals through teachings. But they have not been able to work in synergy in tackling the *Boko Haram* insurgency. This together with their biblical literalism which motivates religious intolerance can serve as obstacles in the response to the violence orchestrated by *Boko Haram* adherents.

5. The Way Forward

It is undeniable that the terrorist activities of the *Boko Haram* sect that are partly couched in religious terms must be rolled back and eliminated. To this moment, Christian churches have responded to the insurgency in mixed ways, with some gains. But the extremism drags on and innovative Christian responses are indispensable. In fact, a rethinking of the response approach, with the intent of winning the war against this terror is necessary. Whilst Christians have been victims of *Boko Haram* insurgency, the actual number of Christians killed in this jihadist violence is insignificant when compared with the number of Muslims killed. This is indicative that in their response, Christians must work closely with the moderate Muslims who are also targeted by the sect. In this light, the Muslim-Christian dialogue in Cameroon needs to be heightened and tailored towards addressing the religious underpinnings of the insurgency. As a matter of fact, this is the moment when Christian churches should renounce illusions of superiority with regard to their own faith tradition, and should engage in frank and honest ecumenical talks with Muslims.

But so far, Pentecostals who have developed evangelical interest in north Cameroon seem to be unwilling to take this course. They are radical in their approach and see Muslims as people caged in paganism. It is therefore time for Pentecostals to be associated with the ongoing religious dialogue whose goal is to build a culture of peace and pluralism in a Cameroon pervaded by a culture of religious violence. Hence, religious dialogue on the subject of *Boko Haram* should take the form of inclusive consultations and discussions so as to ensure that the views of all Christian and Muslim leaders are obtained. Given that religious diversity in Cameroon is so obvious and that the constitution makes provision for tolerance, Christian churches need to be sincere about issues linked to Islam. However, a key reality to keep in mind by Christian leaders and their faithful is that Islam which is partly used to justify the terrorism is the second largest religion in the country. It is therefore imperative for Christians, especially Pentecostals, to improve their understanding of the faith by looking at Muslims with new eyes and judge Islam by its teachings, not just the radical beliefs and actions of a radical few. So, all Christians should strive for a better awareness of Islam to which they do not belong. Christian response to Muslim extremism must not be used to justify the radicalization of Christians. It is only by identifying and addressing the issues that breed hatred and radicalism can Christian churches engage in the fight against *Boko Haram* in gainful ways.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine how the *Boko Haram* insurgency has affected Christian churches in Cameroon along with their responses to the intolerance. The study has established that Christian churches have suffered at the hands of *Boko Haram* insurgents, causing them to engage in

adaptive responses which, to some degree, amount to defective peacebuilding efforts. Regaining this peace requires the pursuance of a holistic approach in which Christian churches should come on board by tapping from Christianity's potential as a resource for peace. Concrete measures, including those already highlighted, are therefore required to enable Christian churches to respond in gainful ways to the insurgency. While responding to the humanitarian crisis provoked by the terror, the Christian clergy need to prevent the possible radicalization of their faithful in north Cameroon and the rest of the country. In doing this, they should build on Christian peace values and should try to understand the impact of the insurgency upon their Christians. This is because persistent attacks on Christians can result in psychological implications capable of pushing them to opt for a militant response to the Islamic violence orchestrated by a radical few. In this light, the study recommends that Christian churches should adopt a coherent and comprehensive response to preserve religious tolerance among Christians and Muslims in view of avoiding the kind of religious violence seen in neighbouring Nigeria and Central African Republic.

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