

AN APPRAISAL OF VIOLENT PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA : A CALL FOR A CHANGE IN MODUS OPERANDI

Joy Isaiah Tonga

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Hosea Nakina Martins

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Taraba State University, Jalingo
tongajoy2@gmail.com; hoseanakinamartins81@gmail.com

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Abstract

The Gospel is the word of God written by men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and for the salvation of mankind. The paper examined " Violent preaching of the Gospel in contemporary Nigeria: A Call for a Change in Modus Operandi" which have abused or twisted for selfish aggrandizement. The paper made use of analytic, descriptive and comparative methods. The paper made use of field survey method, and data were assembled from sampled interviews across some selected States in Nigeria, observer participation and from books. It has been discovered by the paper that, Christ's mandate of preaching the Gospel was not conceived out of violence as violent preachers today coerced people into believing that the Gospel must be preached in such a way. Furthermore, violent preachers work under the influence of intoxicants and demonic possessions whereby the congregation is threatened and compelled to yield to any demand made from them by these preachers. The paper condemns in strong terms continual abuse of the Gospel by violent preachers. There should be a change in modus operandi of violent preaching of the Gospel among preachers now and always. There is need also for the Gospel to be respected, preached in a peaceful manner as Christ and His apostles did without distorting its essence using threats.

Keywords: Christian(s), Gospel, Modus Operandi, preaching and violent

Introduction

"Violent preaching of the Gospel in 21st Century Nigeria: A Change in Modus Operandi " is indeed a worrisome rising phenomenon. The rate at which the Gospel is being distorted among Christ's faithfuls by violent preachers today is indeed worrisome. The command of Christ in (John 20:21) which reads "as the father has sent me, even so I send you" and that which echoed of Matthew 28:16-20 which also enthused: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world" has been twisted to suit the violent preachers. The chapters and verses quoted above contain the so-called missionary mandate which Christ hands down to the Apostles, which vividly defines at the same time the missionary nature of the Church ("Directives of the Pope for the Apostolate" 258).

Christ did not want preaching the Gospel to end with Him, He therefore chose some apostles and disciples and charged them to do as He has directed. They are to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Christians are a people who follow and put their trust and believe in the teachings of Jesus. The word of God is peace, and as it been preached it carries with it power which must fulfilled its purpose in life. The rise of violent preachers these days in our society is very alarming because every violent preacher portrays that he or she is charged by the Holy Spirit to carry out the divine mandate of proclaiming the good news (259).

The approach been adopted by violent preachers of the Gospel in various nook and crannies of Nigeria are indeed very worrisome. It has been rightly laments that, Nigerian society as full of

paradoxes and one of the countries in the world that has high level of a religiously proliferated Christian sects, and serving as a breeding ground for over one thousand Christian sects (Nwigwe106). Thus, the truth is not far fetched from the above assertion with the proliferation of violent preachers in contemporary Nigeria which seemed to be attributed to Pentecostal churches and their champions who defend such aggressive preaching as the quickest means to win souls, making judicious and exaggerative over emphasis of the scripture and politicizing themselves as the most vocal presenters of the Gospel(Achunike 1).

It is worthy to reiterating also that, if one observed our streets, churches, market squares, township stadiums, school playing grounds, offices have become targets avenues for violent preaching to take place. It is also pathetic the consequences of violent preaching has continue to rise with the use of modern communication devices, which project the image of the Gospel using radio sets, Television, satellite dishes, YouTube and instagram, Tiktok,Facebook. It is interesting to note further that, on turning to media channels, one is even greeted by aggressive preachers holding tenaciously the Bible as a tool of defense in propagation of the Gospel.

Violent preachers of the Gospel today also mount speakers on cars, churches pinnacle, and crusade grounds are not spared because, aggressive preachers now enjoy free and high spirited opportunity by presenting the message in the fastest means covering a large magnitude of space and time. Hence, emphasis on sin, demons, prosperity and protection are common words found on the lips of these preachers. It is the focus of this paper to examine the causes, effects, and solution to violent preaching in contemporary Nigeria despite different methods of preaching it. The paper is going to examine the origin of violent preaching, common characteristics of violent preachers, methods of violent preaching, reasons for violent preaching and effects of violent preaching and some recommendations will be proffered .

Origin of Violent Preaching

Many Christian preachers make ardent claim of the origin of violent preaching to have began with the great command Jesus gave the Disciples and Apostles. It is worth reiterating that, some of the claims could be x-rayed on this manner:Christ did want the communication of God to end with Him and within the Jewish society. He however established the church by calling and choosing the disciple and apostles (Oborji 46).

Even though violent preaching was at coma among preachers, its inception cannot be ascertained because the phenomenon is as old as the Gospel preached by violent preachers today. In Christ's imperative to the disciples “go out into the whole, and problem of the Good news in Mtt. 28:19-20 was a driving force behind the early apostles missionary activities which have been twisted by contemporary violent preachers of the Gospel, who lay claims to have received the vigor from the scripture as stated by Christ.

Thus, Christ did not want the communication of the Gospel to end with Him and within the Jewish society. Hence, He established the church by calling and choosing the disciples and apostle to carry out the divine mandate as received from the father (46). However, many violent preachers of the Gospel today lay claims on the earlier assertion made that the word of God is the dynamic quality of God's very own activity, an activity which can be found enmeshed in life (Albertine 222). Furthermore,violent preaching is been defended and attributed to the Gospel excerpt of the divine mandate Christ gave His co helpers to preaching the Gospel, which is evidently been attributed to the call to go out to the whole world and make disciple of all nations is taken as an alacrity task by violent Gospel preachers considered as the champions in the Pentecostal denominations (Evaristus 39).

It is worth noting that, most violent preaching originated since the time of John the Baptist (Matt

11:12), which continue till day as affirmed by Hassana(Oral Interview). Going further also, the root of violent preaching was not originated from the Bible, but a misconstrued of essence of speaking in tongues as charged by the Holy Spirit, which Pentecostal have distorted and portrayed preaching in aggressive manner. Furthermore, as reiterated, the Pentecostals preach enthusiasm and gesture and their activities everywhere portraying such characteristics (Achunike1).

Thus, from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffered violence and that is another reason why some preachers go into violent preaching and turning the Christian faith as a faith of confusion as been reiterated in Matt. 11:12. Similarly also, Otonko reiterated that "Christ has given an un-restrainable charge to all Christians to preach the Gospel no matter the circumstance or situation" (47). But most violent preachers make many claims with a lot of twisting real essence of preaching the Gospel. Many make claims of the injunction of Acts 2:1-4 which reads:

When the day of Pentecost came around, the apostle had all met together, when suddenly there came from heaven a sound of a violent wind which filled the entire house in which they were all sitting and there separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues as the spirits directs them.

It is Interesting to say that, violent preachers make vigorous claims that violent preaching could be dated back to the Nineteenth and twentieth (19th and 20th) centuries with the speedy rise of Pentecostalism. While some also make claim that the movement can be traced to the Old Testament period(45-46). Hence, most claims provided here are to unravel the fact that violent preaching began somewhere meant of violent preaching which is as old as the preachers who adopt it. One cannot lay claim to the exact origin when of violent preaching started. What is of utmost relevance here is that, violent preaching in Christianity today sprang from diverse sources, periods, which still exerts great influence in churches, prayer houses, ministries, rallies, conventions, gathering, crusades in host of other places too.

Methods of Violent Preaching

Violent preaching of the Gospel among preachers may differ based on the pattern some choose to use in addressing the congregation which some of them are below adumbrated and examined:

- I. The use of songs has succeeded in enticing believers who are inclined to music to flock to those musical churches, where violent preaching takes order of the day. It is in this like that it has been asserts that, "the use of song has succeeded in exhibiting the attitudes of the devotion to go commanding God" (Oborji51).
- II. The use of posters, bill boards, souvenirs, pamphlets are aggressively plying our offices, streets, motor parks, markets, school, shops, , where one stumbles over aggressive distributors of various inscription like "if you don't belief, you perish, Heaven and hell are real, repent and have life in so and so church, and have life in abundance. Another statements that is aggressively being uttered by violent preachers is that: "Your life is not the same when you fellowship with us, and your reward is going to be double. Similar assertions like "Our God answers by fire, and He is not a sleeping God, but one who is active when ever we shout on His name, He hears us".
- III. As further observed, some of these violent preachers mount speakers on top of their cars blasting all sorts of Gospel music and commentaries to be followed by viral violent preaching. The electronic media is not left out, where violent preaching is been broadcasted live on coverage of TV, radio and twitter channels of public and private stations to win more crowd(Otonko40-43).
- IV. There is personal confrontation from door to door by violent preachers of the Gospel, which is on the rise these days as one hears *ratatata* or *kon kon kon* at his or her gate, and

as the gate or door is open, one is greeted by an aggressive or persuading preacher saying, good morning or evening sir or madam, receive Jesus as your Lord and personal saviour or you perish, come for your deliverance at Prosperity Business Crusade Church” (Ajim 38).

- V. Hence, many of these violent preachers decide to woo members by the kind of gifts like food, cloth, cosmetics so called anointed water or gaya or olive oil which they distribute to people in the streets and later aggressively appealed to them to come forth for prayers at so and so church, stadium, school pavilion or football fields with designated names mounted on the streets or pliers or pamphlets for assurance of financial breakthrough .

Characteristics of Violent Preachers

Violent preachers of the Gospel seemed to possess some basic features. Some of them some are been examined below:

- i. Violent is one of the basic features of violent preachers because of the missionary mandate of Christ which is seen as an un-restrainable charge to all Christians to preach the Gospel no matter the circumstance or situation (Otonko 47). Hence, that fervent and aggressive mood is in violent preachers , who see the need to carry out the task of preaching the Gospel as mandated by Christ.
- ii. Violent preachers are ubiquitous in nature charging people to accept Jesus as their Lord and personal Saviour by coercion. They could be seen at motor parks, markets, streets, road sides which these scenes are transformed into a covenant venue for aggressive preaching the words of God (39). Johnson further asserts similarly that, "some of these violent preachers often are engaged in mobile preaching there by mounting nefarious blasting speakers and playing all sorts of Gospel music at their peak volumes in order to attract people' attention to listen to them" (Oral Interview).
- iii. The ability to perform miracles or signs, therefore deluding the masses with fallacious packages of presentation of the Gospel is on the rise today. Hence, they reiterated emphatically that, demons caused Christians to sin, imprisoned to eternal death. In response of the divine mandate, they violently go into preaching and pretense of casting demons using the people' psychology (Otonko 49). Furthermore, they tell or lied to people that they are been chained by unknown spirits and that the progressive of the persons can only be restored when the person submit himself or Christ and their possession to the pastors violently, these Christians are subjected to aggressive mood of receiving the words preaching in order to be okay.
- iv. The Bible has become a tool of violence and exploitation in the hands of these unscrupulous and charlatan preachers, who are always seen fanatically moving around with it, compelling people to be part of sharing the spiritual message. Hence, these preachers violently over emphasized on the spirit who is seen as manifest in the lives of Christians and effects instruments of grace to others in the body of Christ the saviour.
- v. Another Characteristic of violent preachers is the rise of criticizing other domination in order to woo more members to their flock. Hence, they referred to this act as 'aggressive sheep stealing'. However, it has been reiterated further that at the dawn of twentieth century, it has assumed a more aggressive posture in the mainline churches when it comes to preaching the word of God (50) spraying tentacles everywhere today.
- vi. Another feature of violent preachers is the claim of the gift of counsel which makes Christians more productive in guiding others and ourselves in doing the will of God with the gift of the Holy Spirit, which grows a supernatural ability to regulate one's personal life in regard to the task to be accomplished (53) .Thus, according to Idris "violent claims of quoting chapters and verses lay bare to convincing the faithful to subject themselves to their kind of aggressive presentation of the Gospel"(Oral Interview).

Factors Instigating the Rise of Violent Preaching of the Gospel in Contemporary Nigeria

There are a lot of related factors instigating the rise of violent preaching of the Gospel today, and some of them are below examined:

- i. There is the ardent desire to create an impression that one is filled with the power the Holy Spirit as in the day of Pentecost, when the apostle charge to be bold in preaching the Gospel without fear or favour to the ends of earth. According to Karbon, "this zealous and pseudo- fervent impression created in most preaching by these violent preachers on the congregation is to create an enabling panorama to show the crowd that the violent preacher is really called by God and is fearless in preaching the Gospel(Oral Interview).
- ii. Another reason is to create awareness that the preacher is ever ready to give assurance to the people's faith as a defender of the Gospel.Dada affirmed also that, "such an impression are not clearly deeming because they are carried out with the aim of canvassing more members in the Church" (Oral Interview) In another similar manner as observed Nyabong "many of the preachers portrayed themselves fully packaged to carry out the mandate of violent preaching"(Oral Interview). Furthermore, according Inuwa, "the desire for firm and popularity is ignited so that more of the violent preaching by the preacher would canvas more souls to his flock, thereby skyrocketing the swells of his financial collection or tithes" (Oral Interview). Okpaleke succinctly observes also that, "boom in violent preaching is carried out with the aim of winning more souls and to increase boom in fund raising in the church, which has led to the abuse of the institution of the word of God" (24).
- iii. Some violent preachers as similarly observes Bitonopa "quickly get advertised and as they receive new members in their churches, who are later defrauded with the statement "time to offer for the expansion of God's kingdom". Encyclopedia Britanica sees poverty as a phenomenon that is as old as human history, and its significance has changed over time (as qtd. in Kass et. al1). Many violent preachers of the Gospel today are bedridden due to poverty which is associated also with poor health, low levels of education or skills, and the unwillingness to work and disorderly behaviour (2). These preachers affirmed Nyabong , they preach and think they can win more souls to quench their financial hunger(Oral Interview). Thus, the belief and strong hold on material well being is so pervasive in the mind of the Nigerian preachers, that he is ready to forge a unity of methods involving prayers as well as sourcing aid to achieve their objectives (Nwigwe 107).
- iv. Abuse of alcoholic substances is also an instigating factor to violent preaching of the Gospel today. Most of these preachers often drink alcohol, marijuana in tea or smoke it, or take some stimulating drug substances like cocaine, caffeine so as to make them high. Paul observes interstingly also that, "these substances often necessitate in the rise of violent preaching" (Oral Interview). As also observed, according to Okonko, "his friend being a pastor in one of these Pentecostal churches, before he goes to conduct the Sunday service, he has made it a point of duty to rushed two passport size of intoxicated dry gin call seaman,which according to him makes him have dodge courage and preach violently without fear" (Oral Interview).
- v. As also observed Awoshiri, "there is high level of ignorance from these violent preachers on the spiritual implications of their preaching(Oral Interview). Furthermore, as notes Inuwa, "the word of God which is not violent its has been portrayed by these ignorant and violent preachers who lack the pre-requisites of solemn preaching to present it in violent manner leading to spiritual degeneration of the people" (Oral Interview).
- vi. Many violent preachers of the Gospel today are indeed possessed by demons or they just preached based on directive of some violent spiritual forces who required them to preach violently. Haruna also observes that "some demonic spirits required the preacher to be violent in his or her preaching in order for him to be populous" (Oral Interview). In

another similar vein, Fredrick buttress that “some preachers received the power of demons to preach with it. And these powers can only be exercised using aggressive stylistic approach in order for the word to yield results (Oral Interview). While Andoma affirmed also that, "some of these violent preachers belong to the occultic guilds of end time preachers" (Oral Interview).

vii. Violent preachers of the Gospel threaten Christians to repent or face calamities. Thus, the desire of God sending His only begotten son was for the world to be saved is indeed twisted by using violence. Since the world is full of evil and men have sinned and fall short of God's glory, Christ send his only begotten for the salvation of souls. Thus, these preachers according to Atando "see the need to preach repentance and forgiveness of people's sin by issuing out threatening words for them to repent"(Oral Interview). In another vein, these violent preachers see the need to threaten people to repent or face consequence of God's wrath. Hence, they see the need of the world messed up in sin approaching speedily. This they proclaim dies, *irae*, dies *illa* that the day of wrath, that day of terror when the Lord will judge the living and the dead and destroy the world by fire (Ndiokwere121).

vii. There is need to awaken high spirit of worship in the congregation which violent preachers often emphatically by preaching so in order to reawaken the spirit or morals of worships to be actively involved in internalizing the words preached to them. According to Votoh, “whenever our pastors preached violently, those who are sleeping often get alerted and listen with rapt attention” (Oral Interview). Most worshipers today prefer violent preaching than the solemn one. According to Biwon "people often run to a preacher who is so dramatic in presenting violently the Gospel. In fact, these types of preachers are mostly preferred by the youths who are exuberant" (Oral Interview).

Implications of Violent Preaching of the Gospel for Christian Faith in Contemporary Nigeria

Violent preaching has related effects to the Christian faith as it is busy being preached in our streets, churches motor parks, football fields, pavilions and even offices today. Thus, some of these effects include:

- i. Violent preaching by preachers wish to make a special effort to fulfill Christ's command to go and make disciples of all nations, but in an aggressive approach. In fact, these violent preachers have succeeded in uprooting many Christians to becoming active members of such unguided movement (Fitzerald 25). Sad to reiterate also that, many Christians have been rendered confused on the kind of violent preaching preached by these preachers whether that was the instruction they received from Christ to preach in such a way or not.
- ii. Violent preaching as observed Lonyu has succeeded in creating serious extremism among Christians (Lonyu, Oral Interview). In another related view also, Andoma observes that "there is also rise in denominational rivalry among Christ faithful leading to crises of faiths" (Oral Interview). As further observed, in our streets, offices, markets and motor parks, one is been confronted with distorted extracts of passages from the Bible by these mobile violent preachers pretending to be preaching, while forcibly carrying placards, pamphlets, souvenirs, stickers and brandishing forcefully to people to attend their rallies, prayer houses, ministries or conventions. Thus, these violent preachers as opines Aboh "use the mass media also as the fastest coverage to confused and mislead believers (Oral Interview). Sad to reiterate also that, sharing of written inscriptions on papers (pamphlets, stickers or invitation cards) by violent preachers insist that people should collect them which has become violent and source of brawl between these preachers and the people forced. Hence, the starry of preaching has the values of action and demands an act of conversion because preaching is an act of God which many of these violent preachers abused on daily basis (Dufour 451).
- iii. The issue of denominational doctrines differ among preachers and as such the Gospel is

preached violently there by creating a lot of opportunities to convince other faiths to accept such violent and erroneous teachings coming from the other violent preachers. Thus, aggressive preaching has succeeded in splitting or dwindling the authentic faith of many Christians with regards to their religious faith affiliation (Martins et al 142).

- iv. Denominational rivalry is on the rise, which also created suspicion among Christians due to patronage of the mass media. Violent preaching is further culminated in rising the insistence on the various teaching of the sacred text which is been disagreed by other denominations (138). The word of God is the highest common round for Christian unity especially in Nigeria, but violent preachers are busy dichotomizing it (Odunsi and Jalasun 38).
- v. Government on its part has not been proactive in regulating the use of mass media by aggressive preachers. Thus, some of these violent preachers pay huge amount of money in order to have longer use of the purchased air time on some of these media channels. Thus, aggressive preachers of the Gospel take advantage of the mass media and virally abuse its purpose of educating, enlightening entertaining the public. According to Yunusa, rampant patronage of the media houses according is been abused among rival preachers, while some of them are busy opening their own Television, radio and print houses to violently preach and canvass for more souls (Oral Interview).
- vi. Violent preaching has succeeded in accelerating the ill health condition of those who are sick especially the aged, who are suffering from hypertension, stroke and thrombosis, and who needed some silence to recuperate but to no avail in these violent churches. On similar regard also, Kator went further to observe that "many of the elderly people stopped coming to church for fear of hearing violent preaching coming from sophisticated and thunderous micro phones and speakers" (Oral Interview).

Recommendations

Amidst the rise of violent preaching of the Gospel and its impact in contemporary Nigeria, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- i. Violent preachers of the Gospel should have a rethink and prepared to desist from preaching the Gospel violently. They should learn to follow the pattern of Jesus by trusting and loving His words to be preached in a more peaceful manner. Thus, aggressive preaching which is not part of the triune God should be condemned in totality (Schineller 9).
- ii. Jesus preached peace as sent by the father, and violent preachers should apparently not put the word of God as catalyst for division and conflict. There should be peaceful conversion of attitude for the word of God to be preached and accepted (Nebechukwu 271). Thus, the preacher must preach the sacred word peacefully as Jesus Christ did for the salvation of humanity, which means mission and authority, bear the hallmark of directive and power (Dufour 451).
- iii. Like the prophets of old, pastors and Christians in general in our generation are expected to preach fearlessly and not violently where ever they found themselves (Ajim 37). God is not considered by the Bible as a violent creator, He is not transgressing the covenant of which he is the author and guarantor which Christians must learn on how to receive and preach his word (33).
- iv. Furthermore, preachers of the Gospel should be bold and not aggressive in preaching the Gospel. They should have full authority and speak like the first apostles without arrogance and intimidation. Christians must be vigilant and guard against the institution of violent preaching in order for the faith not to be deflected from the central truths of Christ's message and the loving behaviour of all true Christians (Fitzgerald 27). Preachers should also learn to come together to issue urgent call to inner conversion and Character formation on their part and their flocks for peace to reign in the Christian faith than use violent preaching as an antidote to their selfish aggrandizement (Odunsi 37).

- v. The scenario of violent preaching of the Gospel in contemporary Nigeria calls for a modified and peaceful approach of preaching the word of God for the salvation of mankind. Hence, the peaceful nature and unity of God's words are the basic hallmarks that preachers should try and emulate and not to resort to the use of violent approach, which is busy threatening authentic Christian faith today. God is not a Christian property but is a common property of all religions which He must be preached peacefully (Nwigwe 108) and Christian preachers must learn to preach His word in a more peaceful manner. However, the missionary task of the Church as a mandate given by Christ entails that the Gospel does not have to adopt to a violent approach of being preached as it is happening today (Ogwuche et al 33).

Conclusion

The divine mandate of preaching the Gospel of Christ as directed by Him has been misconstrued, twisted, distorted and abused by violent preachers on daily basis in worship centres, streets, motor parks, offices, school arena as an on going lamentable phenomenon. God is not a violent God, and He spoke and it came to being without adopting violent strategies to popularize His ministry nor even extort or compelled people to belief in Him as seen happening today. Peace, love, and self dedication are prerequisites of preaching the Gospel to the ends of the earth. As a daily phenomenon, violent preaching of the Gospel is in no way justifiable because Christ did not force or coerced people to accept His word, which is life and truth. Preachers of the Gospel today are encouraged to desist from distorting the content of the Gospel via aggressive and exploitative approaches. Instead, they should be peaceful preachers of the Gospel of Christ at all times in order for the Gospel to remain rooted, solemn and yield fruitful results in the lives of Christ faithful now and always.

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