

Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Matthew 5:9 And the Impossibility of The Kingdom Ethics in Northern Nigeria

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*Abstract- The Beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (Matt. 5:9), presents one of the most demanding ethical teachings in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. In Northern Nigeria, where ethnoreligious conflicts, insurgency, banditry, and communal violence continue to threaten peaceful coexistence, the practical relevance of this Kingdom ethic is often questioned. This study adopts a qualitative library research methodology, using historical-grammatical exegesis and contextual theological-ethical analysis to examine Matthew 5:9 within its biblical and contemporary contexts. The study investigates the controversy surrounding Kingdom ethics and evaluates whether Jesus’ command to make peace is practicable in a society marked by persistent violence. It argues that the perceived impossibility of Kingdom ethics does not reveal a weakness in Jesus’ teaching but demonstrates the radical nature of Christian discipleship. Engaging John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Miroslav Volf, Emmanuel Katongole, and N. T. Wright, the study maintains that biblical peacemaking is an active vocation involving justice, reconciliation, truth, and restoration rather than passive acceptance of injustice. The Greek term *eirēnopoioi* portrays believers as intentional makers of peace who participate in God’s reconciling mission. The study concludes that Matthew 5:9 remains relevant and practicable in Northern Nigeria when understood as a Spirit-empowered vocation embodied by the Church. Accordingly, the Church is called to become a prophetic community that pursues justice without revenge, forgiveness without denying suffering, and reconciliation without compromising truth, thereby faithfully reflecting the character and mission of God’s Kingdom.*

Keywords: *Sermon on the Mount; Kingdom Ethics; Peacemaking (*eirēnopoioi*); Christian Ethics; Northern Nigeria.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The ethical teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) occupy a central place in Christian theology and ethics. Among the Beatitudes, the declaration, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (Matt. 5:9), stands as one of the clearest expressions of the character and mission of God’s Kingdom. The Beatitudes describe not merely the attitudes believers should possess but the identity and lifestyle of those who belong to God’s reign. Consequently, peacemaking is presented not as an optional Christian virtue but as an essential mark of faithful discipleship. Through this Beatitude, Jesus calls His followers to become active participants in God’s work of reconciliation by promoting justice, healing broken relationships, and overcoming hostility through love. The practical application of this Kingdom ethic, however, has remained one of the most debated issues in Christian ethics. Throughout church history, scholars have disagreed on whether the ethical demands of the Sermon on the Mount are fully applicable in the present age or whether they represent ideal standards that await complete fulfillment in the future Kingdom of God. Commands such as loving enemies, forgiving offenders, turning the other cheek, and making peace appear difficult to practice in societies characterized by violence, injustice, and political instability. Consequently, some theologians have interpreted these teachings as ideals that expose humanity’s inability to achieve God’s perfect standard, while others maintain that Jesus intended them to be the normative pattern for Christian living through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. This debate is particularly significant within the context of Northern Nigeria. For several decades, the region has experienced persistent ethnoreligious conflicts, insurgency, terrorism, farmer-herder clashes, banditry,

kidnapping, and communal violence. These conflicts have resulted in thousands of deaths, massive displacement of people, destruction of property, deep psychological trauma, and the erosion of trust among communities. For many Christians who have suffered violence and persecution, Jesus' command to become peacemakers raises difficult ethical questions. Can victims genuinely forgive those who have inflicted great suffering? Can reconciliation occur without justice? Does biblical peacemaking require passive acceptance of oppression, or does it include active resistance against injustice? These questions make Matthew 5:9 highly relevant to contemporary Christian witness in Northern Nigeria.

This paper argues that the apparent impossibility of practicing Kingdom ethics in Northern Nigeria does not reveal a weakness in the teaching of Jesus but rather demonstrates the radical and transformative nature of Christian discipleship. The study adopts a qualitative library research methodology employing historical-grammatical exegesis and contextual theological-ethical analysis to examine the meaning and contemporary significance of Matthew 5:9. It engages major voices in Christian ethics and peacebuilding, including John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Miroslav Volf, Emmanuel Katongole, N. T. Wright, and John Paul Lederach, to evaluate the relationship between biblical peacemaking, justice, reconciliation, and conflict transformation. This work is organized into six major sections. Following this introduction, it examines the Kingdom ethics controversy surrounding the Sermon on the Mount, explains the meaning of peacemaking in Matthew 5:9, evaluates the debate concerning the apparent impossibility of Kingdom ethics, and applies Jesus' peace ethic to the violent context of Northern Nigeria. Finally, the study concludes by demonstrating that Christian peacemaking remains both relevant and practicable when understood as a Spirit-empowered vocation through which the Church faithfully embodies the reconciling mission of God's Kingdom in a fractured society.

Statement of the Research Problem

The Sermon on the Mount presents peacemaking as a central characteristic of citizens of God's Kingdom. In

Matthew 5:9, Jesus declares, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." However, the practical application of this teaching remains contested, particularly in contexts marked by persistent violence. This challenge is evident in Northern Nigeria, where ethnoreligious conflicts, terrorism, banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, communal violence, displacement, and unresolved grievances continue to threaten peaceful coexistence. In such circumstances, Jesus' call to make peace, forgive offenders, love enemies, and reject retaliation appears difficult and, to some, impossible to practice. The problem is further complicated by the controversy surrounding Kingdom ethics. While scholars such as John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King Jr. affirm the present applicability of Jesus' ethical teachings, others qualify their application because of human sinfulness, civil authority, political responsibility, and eschatological considerations. Although considerable scholarship exists on the Sermon on the Mount, nonviolence, reconciliation, and peacebuilding, limited attention has been given to the specific practicality of Matthew 5:9 within Northern Nigeria's prolonged violence. This study therefore examines whether Jesus' command to become peacemakers is practicable in this context and how the Church can pursue justice, reconciliation, truth, and restoration without compromising its Kingdom identity.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the practicality of Jesus' peace ethic in Matthew 5:9 within the context of persistent violence in Northern Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the meaning of the Beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matt. 5:9), through historical-grammatical exegesis.
2. Evaluate the major scholarly perspectives in the Kingdom ethics controversy concerning the practicality of Jesus' peace ethic.
3. Explain the biblical concept of peacemaking (*eirēnopoioi*) and its significance within the Kingdom of God.

4. Assess the challenges and possibilities of practicing Matthew 5:9 in the violent context of Northern Nigeria.
5. Propose biblical and practical recommendations for the Church's peacebuilding ministry in Northern Nigeria.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Kingdom Ethics

The concept of Kingdom ethics refers to the moral values and way of life that characterize those who belong to the Kingdom of God. It is rooted in the teachings and person of Jesus Christ and finds its fullest expression in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7). Rather than presenting a list of religious rules, Kingdom ethics describes the lifestyle expected of citizens of God's Kingdom. John Howard Yoder (1994) argues that Kingdom ethics is not an unattainable moral ideal but the actual social ethic that Jesus intended His followers to practice. According to Yoder, the Church is called to become an alternative community whose life reflects reconciliation, forgiveness, and nonviolence in contrast to the coercive values of the world. Likewise, Stanley Hauerwas (1983) maintains that the ethics of Jesus define the identity of the Christian community. He argues that the primary concern is not whether the teachings of Jesus appear politically successful but whether the Church faithfully embodies them. Similarly, N. T. Wright (2010) understands Kingdom ethics within the larger story of God's Kingdom breaking into history through Jesus Christ. For Wright, the Beatitudes describe the present character of God's renewed people who already participate in His future Kingdom. Drawing from these perspectives, this study understands Kingdom ethics as the ethical demands of God's reign revealed through Jesus Christ and embodied by believers through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Peacemaking (*Eirēnopoioi*)

The Greek word *eirēnopoioi*, translated "peacemakers," appears only once in the New Testament in Matthew 5:9. It literally means "those who make peace," emphasizing active rather than passive involvement in restoring broken relationships. Jonathan Pennington (2018) argues that the Beatitudes

describe the character of people who flourish under God's reign. According to him, peacemaking reflects the very character of God and demonstrates genuine participation in His Kingdom. Similarly, Glen Stassen and David Gushee (2016) argue that Jesus' commands should be understood as "transforming initiatives" that interrupt cycles of violence and create opportunities for reconciliation. They maintain that peacemaking is an active response that seeks restorative justice rather than passive avoidance of conflict. Miroslav Volf (1996) further explains that genuine peacemaking requires balancing justice, forgiveness, truth, and reconciliation. He argues that forgiveness does not ignore evil but opens the possibility of restored relationships after justice has been acknowledged. In this study, peacemaking is understood as the intentional pursuit of justice, reconciliation, and restored relationships in ways that reflect the character of God and the teachings of Jesus.

Peace (*Shalom*)

The biblical understanding of peace extends far beyond the absence of conflict. The Hebrew word *shalom* denotes wholeness, well-being, justice, harmony, security, and flourishing under God's covenant. Nicholas Wolterstorff (2004) explains that biblical peace is inseparable from justice because genuine peace exists only where people experience right relationships with God and one another. Likewise, Cornelius Plantinga Jr. (2002) describes *shalom* as "the way things ought to be," where human beings live in harmony with God, others, creation, and themselves. Christopher J. H. Wright (2006) also argues that God's redemptive mission seeks the restoration of every dimension of human life, making peace an essential aspect of God's mission in the world. Accordingly, this study understands peace (*shalom*) as holistic well-being characterized by justice, reconciliation, right relationships, and human flourishing under the reign of God.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two complementary theories: Conflict Transformation Theory, developed by John Paul Lederach in the 1990s, particularly through his 1995 work *Preparing for Peace*, and Kingdom Ethics, developed within contemporary Christian ethics by John Howard Yoder in 1972, especially through *The*

Politics of Jesus. These theories provide both a social and theological basis for examining Matthew 5:9 in Northern Nigeria. Conflict Transformation Theory explains that peace is more than stopping violence. It was developed by John Paul Lederach in the 1990s and focuses on changing the relationships, attitudes, structures, and social conditions that produce and sustain conflict. In simple terms, the theory argues that conflicts cannot be permanently solved merely by stopping fighting. The causes of the conflict must also be addressed, broken relationships must be rebuilt, and communities must be helped to live together again. Johan Galtung's earlier distinction between negative and positive peace (1969) supports this understanding. Negative peace means the absence of violence, while positive peace involves justice, equality, reconciliation, and healthy relationships. This theory is relevant to Matthew 5:9 because Jesus calls His followers to become active makers of peace rather than merely avoid conflict.

Kingdom Ethics on the other hand, is a theological approach associated particularly with John Howard Yoder (1972), and further developed by Stanley Hauerwas (1981) and Glen Stassen (1992). It teaches, in simple terms, that Christians should live according to the values of God's Kingdom as revealed in the teachings and life of Jesus. Yoder emphasizes nonviolence and reconciliation, Hauerwas emphasizes the Church's responsibility to embody Jesus' way of life, while Stassen emphasizes practical actions that interrupt cycles of violence. Together, these perspectives explain why Christians are called to pursue peace even within difficult circumstances. Thus, Conflict Transformation Theory explains how peace can be built, while Kingdom Ethics explains why Christians are called to build it.

The two theories employed in this study, Kingdom Ethics and Conflict Transformation Theory, complement each other by addressing different but interconnected dimensions of peacemaking. Kingdom Ethics provides the theological and moral foundation for understanding Matthew 5:9 by explaining why Christians are called to become *eirēnopoioi*, or active peacemakers. It identifies the values that should guide Christian conduct, including love, forgiveness, justice, reconciliation, nonviolence, and obedience to Jesus.

Conflict Transformation Theory, developed by John Paul Lederach, adds a practical perspective by explaining how relationships, structures, attitudes, and social conditions that sustain conflict can be transformed. Its emphasis on relational restoration and structural change corresponds closely with the biblical understanding of *shalom* as holistic peace. The perspectives therefore converge around the concerns of transformed relationships, justice, reconciliation, and sustainable peace. Kingdom Ethics addresses the question of why the Church should pursue peace according to the teachings of Jesus, while Conflict Transformation explains how peace can be pursued within communities affected by prolonged violence. This relationship is particularly relevant to Northern Nigeria, where conflict cannot be addressed simply by stopping physical violence. Sustainable peace also requires healing broken relationships, addressing grievances, restoring trust, and confronting conditions that contribute to recurring violence. Bringing these perspectives together enables the study to connect the theological demands of Matthew 5:9 with the practical realities of conflict transformation. The two theories consequently provide an appropriate framework for examining how the Church can embody Jesus' peace ethic while responding to the complex social, relational, and structural causes of violence in Northern Nigeria.

III. THE KINGDOM ETHICS CONTROVERSY

The ethical teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), particularly the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matt. 5:9), have generated one of the most enduring controversies in Christian ethics. The central issue is whether Jesus intended His Kingdom ethics to serve as binding ethical norms for Christians in every age or whether they represent ideal standards that cannot be fully implemented in the present world. Commands such as loving one's enemies (Matt. 5:44), turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:39), and making peace appear to conflict with the realities of political authority, self-defense, and social injustice. Consequently, scholars have developed divergent interpretations regarding the practicality of Jesus' peace ethic. While one school of thought regards Matthew 5:9 as a realistic and normative expression of

Christian discipleship, another argues that Jesus' teachings must be interpreted within broader theological, political, or eschatological frameworks.

Advocates of Kingdom ethics argue that the Sermon on the Mount is the ethical constitution of the Kingdom of God and therefore remains normative for the Church. They maintain that Jesus expected His followers to embody His teachings through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit rather than through mere human effort. Among the foremost advocates is John Howard Yoder, whose *The Politics of Jesus* remains foundational for contemporary Christian ethics. Yoder (1994) argues that Jesus deliberately rejected violence as a means of accomplishing God's purposes and established a new social order characterized by reconciliation, forgiveness, and sacrificial love. According to Yoder, the Church is called to embody this alternative Kingdom by practicing active peacemaking rather than conforming to the coercive logic of worldly politics. Similarly, Stanley Hauerwas contends that the Sermon on the Mount defines the identity of the Christian community. Hauerwas (1983, 2011) argues that the primary question is not whether Jesus' ethics are politically successful but whether the Church remains faithful to its calling as God's distinctive people. For Hauerwas, peacemaking is not simply an ethical obligation but an expression of the Church's identity as a community shaped by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer likewise rejects interpretations that reduce the Sermon on the Mount to unattainable ideals. In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer (2001) insists that Jesus' commands require concrete obedience. His concept of "costly grace" emphasizes that authentic discipleship demands practical commitment to Christ's teachings, even when such obedience results in suffering or persecution. Consequently, peacemaking becomes an indispensable mark of faithful discipleship rather than an optional Christian virtue. The practical application of Jesus' peace ethic is perhaps best illustrated in the ministry of Martin Luther King Jr. Drawing directly from the Sermon on the Mount, King (1963) developed a theology of nonviolent resistance that combined justice with reconciliation. He argued that nonviolence is neither passive submission nor cowardice but active resistance to evil through love.

His vision of the Beloved Community demonstrates that peacemaking seeks the transformation of both victims and oppressors without abandoning the pursuit of justice. Contemporary ethicists Glen Harold Stassen and David Philip Gushee further develop this perspective in *Kingdom Ethics*. They argue that Jesus' commands should be understood as "transforming initiatives" that interrupt cycles of violence and create opportunities for reconciliation (Stassen & Gushee, 2016). Rather than prohibiting retaliation alone, Jesus provides practical alternatives that foster restorative justice and peace. Likewise, Nicholas Thomas Wright (2010) maintains that the Beatitudes portray the present identity of God's renewed people who embody the values of God's future Kingdom. According to Wright, Matthew 5:9 describes the vocation of believers who participate in God's redemptive mission by becoming agents of reconciliation in a broken world. Mutually, these scholars affirm that Jesus' peace ethic is neither unrealistic nor impracticable. Instead, it represents the distinctive lifestyle of Kingdom citizens whose lives are transformed by God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In contrast, other theologians question whether the Sermon on the Mount should be applied directly to public life or interpreted as universally binding ethical legislation. Although they affirm the authority of Jesus' teaching, they argue that its application must be understood within broader theological or political realities. Within the Lutheran tradition, Martin Luther distinguished between the spiritual kingdom governed by the gospel and the civil kingdom governed by law. Luther (1962) maintained that while Christians are personally called to forgiveness and humility, civil authorities possess a divine responsibility to restrain evil through the legitimate use of force. Consequently, the commands of Matthew 5 are primarily directed toward personal discipleship rather than governmental policy. John Calvin accepted the enduring moral authority of the Sermon on the Mount but interpreted many of Jesus' sayings as rhetorical expressions intended to emphasize inward righteousness rather than establish absolute legal requirements. Calvin (2005) argued that believers should pursue peace and forgiveness while recognizing the legitimate role of civil government in maintaining justice and public order. Dispensational theologians such as Lewis

Sperry Chafer and John F. Walvoord interpret the Sermon on the Mount primarily within an eschatological framework. Chafer (1947) argues that the ethical standards proclaimed by Jesus anticipate the future Messianic Kingdom and therefore should not be regarded as the governing constitution of the present Church Age. Walvoord (1974) similarly contends that while the Sermon possesses enduring spiritual value, its complete realization belongs to Christ's millennial reign. Accordingly, Matthew 5:9 functions more as an anticipation of future Kingdom conditions than as a comprehensive social ethic for contemporary society. A different challenge emerges from Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian Realism. Niebuhr (1932, 1944) argues that although Jesus' ethic of love remains the highest Christian ideal, political communities operate within a world profoundly affected by sin, self-interest, and the struggle for power. Consequently, governments sometimes have a moral obligation to employ coercive force in order to protect innocent lives and preserve justice. From this perspective, the literal application of nonviolence in every circumstance may unintentionally permit greater injustice. These alternative interpretations underscore the complexities surrounding the application of Jesus' peace ethic in contexts marked by political responsibility, violence, and social disorder. Nevertheless, they do not reject Jesus' teaching; rather, they differ concerning its scope and practical implementation. From the foregoing discussion, the Kingdom ethics controversy ultimately revolves not around the authority of Jesus' teaching but around its applicability within a fallen world. While the proponents maintain that Matthew 5:9 defines the present vocation of the Church as a community of reconciliation, the opposing perspectives argue that the realities of civil authority, human sinfulness, and eschatological expectation qualify its application. This debate provides an essential theological foundation for evaluating the practicality of Jesus' peace ethic within the violent context of Northern Nigeria.

Matthew 5:9 and the Meaning of Peacemaking

A proper understanding of Matthew 5:9 requires attention to the meaning of the word "peacemakers." The Greek word used by Matthew is *eirēnopoioi*, which literally means "those who make peace." It appears only once in the New Testament, emphasizing

the active nature of Christian peacemaking. Jesus does not bless those who merely maintain personal tranquility or avoid difficult conflicts. Rather, He blesses those who intentionally work to restore relationships broken by hostility, injustice, and violence. The idea of peace in Matthew 5:9 is rooted in the wider biblical concept of *shalom*. In the Old Testament, *shalom* signifies more than the absence of war. It includes wholeness, justice, harmonious relationships, security, and the flourishing of communities. Therefore, the peace envisioned by Jesus is not a superficial peace that ignores suffering and oppression. It is a restorative peace that seeks the renewal of human relationships under the reign of God. Jonathan Pennington (2018) argues that the Sermon on the Mount should be understood as Jesus' vision of true human flourishing under God's Kingdom. The Beatitudes do not describe impossible ideals intended to expose human inability. Rather, they portray the character of people who are being transformed by participation in God's reign. The promise that peacemakers "will be called children of God" therefore indicates that peacemaking reflects the character and mission of God Himself. Similarly, N. T. Wright understands the ethics of Jesus within the larger narrative of God's Kingdom breaking into the present world. For Wright (2010), the Sermon on the Mount is not simply a collection of personal moral instructions but a description of a new humanity shaped by the lordship of Jesus. The followers of Christ are called to demonstrate in the present the values of God's future Kingdom.

This interpretation challenges common misunderstandings of Christian peace. Peace is not passivity, weakness, or surrender to evil. Jesus' own ministry demonstrates that peacemaking includes confronting injustice and challenging systems that deny human dignity. Thus, Christian peacemaking must hold together mercy and truth, forgiveness and justice, reconciliation and accountability. Glen Stassen and David Gushee (2016) describe the ethics of Jesus as transformative rather than merely idealistic. According to them, the Sermon on the Mount provides practical ways of breaking cycles of violence and creating possibilities for reconciliation. The commands of Jesus, including the call to love enemies and make peace, represent a new way of living that

resists both violence and hatred. Therefore, Matthew 5:9 presents a radical Kingdom vocation. The peacemaker participates in God's restorative work by confronting hostility with reconciliation and responding to injustice without reproducing the same patterns of violence.

The Impossibility of Kingdom Ethics

The command of Jesus to love enemies, forgive offenders, and make peace has generated intense debate within Christian ethics. The central question is whether the radical demands of the Sermon on the Mount can realistically be practiced in a world dominated by violence, oppression, and the struggle for survival. This question becomes even more urgent in places like Northern Nigeria, where communities have experienced recurring violence, displacement, and loss of life. The apparent impossibility of Kingdom ethics therefore emerges from the tension between the ideal vision of God's reign and the painful realities of human conflict. One of the most influential scholars who rejects the idea that Jesus' ethics are impractical is John Howard Yoder. In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder (1994) argues that the life and teachings of Jesus are not unrealistic spiritual ideals but a concrete political ethic that should shape the life of the Christian community. According to Yoder, Jesus' rejection of violence and His commitment to suffering love reveal a new form of power that challenges the dominant systems of the world. The church is therefore called to embody an alternative social order where reconciliation replaces hostility and service replaces domination. Yoder's position provides a significant challenge to Christian communities in Northern Nigeria. In a context where insecurity has made self-preservation a major concern, the temptation is often to respond to violence with violence. However, Yoder insists that the church's identity must be determined by the example of the crucified Christ rather than by the logic of retaliation. Yet, a critical question remains: Can a community continue to embrace nonviolence when its members are repeatedly attacked and the state fails to provide adequate security? This question reveals the practical difficulty of applying Kingdom ethics within contexts of severe violence.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers another important perspective on the costly nature of Christian discipleship. In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer (2001) argues that Jesus' commands in the Sermon on the Mount are not optional ideals reserved for exceptionally spiritual Christians. Rather, they are concrete commands that demand obedience. Bonhoeffer's distinction between "cheap grace" and "costly grace" is particularly relevant to peacemaking. True discipleship requires believers to follow Christ even when obedience involves suffering, sacrifice, and vulnerability. The significance of Bonhoeffer's thought for Northern Nigeria is that Christian peacemaking cannot be reduced to comfortable theological language. It requires the difficult work of forgiving enemies, resisting hatred, and maintaining faithfulness amid persecution. However, this does not mean accepting injustice or remaining silent in the face of oppression. Bonhoeffer's own resistance to the Nazi regime demonstrates that Christian obedience may involve active confrontation of evil while maintaining commitment to God's moral demands.

The practical demonstration of this tension can be seen in the life and ministry of Martin Luther King Jr. King developed a theology of nonviolent resistance that was deeply rooted in the teachings of Jesus and the Christian understanding of love. For King (1963), nonviolence was not passive submission to injustice but an active method of confronting evil without destroying the humanity of the oppressor. His vision of the Beloved Community imagined a society where justice, equality, and reconciliation would replace systems of hatred and segregation. King's approach offers valuable insights for Northern Nigeria because it provides a middle path between violent retaliation and passive acceptance of oppression. Communities affected by violence may seek justice and demand social transformation while refusing to reproduce the same hatred that has caused their suffering. In this way, peacemaking becomes an act of courageous resistance rather than weakness. The conversation on Christian peacemaking has been further developed by Miroslav Volf, who argues that genuine reconciliation requires the difficult relationship between justice, truth, forgiveness, and embrace. In *Exclusion and Embrace*, Volf (1996) maintains that forgiveness does not mean denying evil or forgetting the pain caused by

violence. Instead, reconciliation requires naming injustice, seeking accountability, and opening the possibility of restored relationships. Volf's argument is particularly important in societies like Northern Nigeria, where victims of violence may perceive forgiveness as a denial of their suffering. Christian ethics must therefore avoid presenting reconciliation as a quick solution to deep historical wounds. Genuine peace requires remembering the past truthfully, addressing injustice, and creating conditions where enemies can become neighbors. These ethical voices demonstrate that the "impossibility" of Kingdom ethics is not primarily a problem with the teachings of Jesus but a reflection of the radical transformation that those teachings demand. Human instincts naturally move toward revenge, self-protection, and the exclusion of those perceived as enemies. The Sermon on the Mount challenges these instincts by calling believers to participate in God's alternative reality of mercy, justice, and reconciliation. The difficulty of Matthew 5:9 is therefore not that peacemaking is unrealistic but that it requires a new identity formed by the Kingdom of God. Christian peacemaking is possible only through spiritual transformation, communal support, and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. The church becomes the place where the impossible ethics of the Kingdom are practiced as a visible witness to God's peace.

Practicing Matthew 5:9 in the Violent Context of Northern Nigeria

The application of Matthew 5:9 in Northern Nigeria must begin with an honest recognition of the complexity of violence in the region. The conflicts affecting Northern Nigeria cannot be adequately explained as simple religious disagreements between Christians and Muslims. While religious identity is often visible in public narratives of violence, a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship demonstrates that such conflicts are produced by multiple overlapping factors. These include historical grievances dating back to colonial and postcolonial state formation, political manipulation of ethnic and religious identity, widening economic inequality, competition over land and natural resources, weak governance structures, and persistent patterns of social exclusion. This multi-causal interpretation is supported by contemporary conflict studies. Marc-

Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (2021) emphasizes that violence in Northern Nigeria must be understood as part of a broader political economy of insecurity in which armed groups, state actors, and local communities interact in complex ways. Similarly, Elizabeth Isichei (2018) argues that religious identities in Nigeria are often mobilized within deeper struggles over citizenship, belonging, and access to resources. These insights reinforce Matthew Hassan Kukah's (1993) argument that religion in Nigeria is frequently entangled with political and social contestation, making it misleading to interpret violence as purely theological disagreement. The realities of Northern Nigeria therefore present a serious ethical challenge for Christian theology. Victims of violence often live with trauma, grief, and unresolved anger. Many communities have experienced repeated cycles of loss, displacement, and insecurity, leading to what Trauma Studies scholar Brandon Hamber (2016) describes as "continuous traumatic stress," where violence is not an isolated event but a persistent lived condition. In such contexts, ethical preaching that emphasizes forgiveness without addressing structural injustice or psychological trauma risks becoming a form of moral abstraction that fails to engage the lived reality of suffering.

Consequently, Christian peacemaking must begin with lament, solidarity, and truthful acknowledgment of pain. The church cannot responsibly proclaim reconciliation without first creating space for victims to name their suffering. This approach is consistent with Emmanuel Katongole's (2017) insistence that African Christianity must begin from lament rather than premature reconciliation. For Katongole, lament is not a lack of faith but a theological act that resists denial and opens the possibility for authentic healing. John Paul Lederach's framework of conflict transformation provides an essential theoretical foundation for engaging Matthew 5:9 in such contexts. Lederach (2014) argues that sustainable peace is not merely the cessation of violence but the transformation of relationships, social structures, and cultural patterns that generate conflict. His approach emphasizes long-term relational rebuilding rather than short-term crisis management. This resonates deeply with the biblical concept of *shalom*, which signifies wholeness, justice, and restored community life. However, recent

peacebuilding scholarship has further developed Lederach's insights. Séverine Autesserre (2021) argues that many peace interventions fail because they focus on elite negotiations while ignoring local everyday realities where violence is reproduced or resisted. In the Nigerian context, this insight is crucial because it highlights the importance of grassroots peacebuilding efforts within communities, churches, and local institutions. Similarly, Paul D. Williams (2020) emphasizes that durable peace requires strengthening local legitimacy structures rather than relying exclusively on top-down political agreements.

Emmanuel Katongole (2017) contributes a theological dimension to this discussion by arguing that African Christianity must develop a new social imagination capable of overcoming entrenched narratives of ethnic division, revenge, and exclusion. For Katongole, violence persists not only because of structural injustice but also because of "social imaginaries" that shape how communities perceive themselves and others. The church, therefore, must become a space where alternative narratives rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are formed and practiced. This alternative imagination is crucial for Northern Nigeria, where identity is often constructed through inherited narratives of suspicion and historical grievance. In such a context, the church is called to become a "re-imagining community" where former enemies can be redefined not by conflict but by shared participation in the reconciling work of Christ. This aligns with the work of Miroslav Volf (1996), who argues that reconciliation requires both justice and the breaking of cycles of exclusion through what he calls "embrace"—a moral movement toward the other that does not deny wrongdoing but refuses to allow it to define the future. Emmanuel M. Katongole and Chris Rice (2008) emphasize that Christian reconciliation must be rooted in concrete practices of table fellowship, shared suffering, and communal re-storying. These practices help transform abstract theological claims into lived social realities.

For Northern Nigerian Christians, therefore, practicing Matthew 5:9 involves a complex set of moral and pastoral responsibilities. First, it requires trauma-sensitive ministry that recognizes the psychological and emotional impact of violence. Without healing, calls to forgiveness may unintentionally reproduce

harm. Second, it requires truthful remembrance of past injustices. Peace built on denial or silence is unstable because unresolved memory continues to generate resentment. Third, it involves advocacy for more equitable social and political structures. This includes addressing corruption, marginalization, unemployment, and unequal access to land and justice systems. Desmond Tutu (2004) reminds in his reflections on reconciliation, there can be no genuine peace without justice that is publicly visible and institutionally supported. Fourth, peacemaking requires intentional interreligious engagement, especially between Christian and Muslim communities. Such engagement must go beyond formal dialogue to include shared community projects, mutual trust-building, and cooperation in addressing common social challenges such as poverty, education, and insecurity. Mohammed Abu-Nimer (2018) argues, interreligious peacebuilding succeeds when it is embedded in shared human concerns rather than abstract theological agreement. Finally, Matthew 5:9 demands a refusal to allow revenge to define Christian identity. This is perhaps the most difficult ethical demand in contexts of sustained violence. However, Christian identity is shaped not by retaliation but by participation in the reconciling work of Christ. This does not imply passivity; rather, it involves what Lisa Schirch (2021) describes as "strategic peacebuilding," which combines moral courage, social action, and nonviolent resistance to injustice. Ultimately, the challenge of Matthew 5:9 in Northern Nigeria is not whether peacemaking is emotionally or politically easy. The deeper question is whether Christian communities are willing to sustain a long-term vocation of peace in the midst of unresolved violence. The Beatitude calls the church not to naïve optimism but to faithful witness. In this sense, the church becomes a living sign of God's future peace inserted into the broken realities of the present world.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study made the following findings:

- i. Matthew 5:9 presents peacemaking as an active Christian vocation rather than passive conflict avoidance. The Greek term *eirēnopoioi* refers to those who intentionally create, restore, and

- sustain peace through justice, reconciliation, and the healing of broken relationships.
- ii. The Kingdom ethics of Jesus are both radical and practicable. Although many scholars consider the ethical demands of the Sermon on the Mount difficult to implement in a violent world, the study found that Jesus intended these teachings to serve as normative principles for Christian discipleship rather than unattainable ideals.
 - iii. The major controversy surrounding Matthew 5:9 concerns its application rather than its authority. While scholars such as John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King Jr. affirm the present applicability of Kingdom ethics, others, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, and Reinhold Niebuhr, qualify its application because of political responsibility, human sinfulness, or eschatological considerations.
 - iv. Biblical peacemaking requires the integration of justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The study found that authentic Christian peace does not ignore injustice or suffering but seeks restoration through truth, accountability, mercy, and reconciliation.
 - v. The violence in Northern Nigeria is multidimensional and cannot be explained solely by religious differences. The conflicts are driven by interconnected historical, political, ethnic, economic, social, and religious factors. Consequently, sustainable peace requires addressing both structural injustices and broken relationships.
 - vi. The Church has a unique and indispensable role in peacebuilding. Beyond preaching peace, the Church is called to become a prophetic and reconciling community through trauma-sensitive pastoral care, interfaith engagement, advocacy for justice, conflict transformation, and community reconciliation.
 - vii. The apparent impossibility of practicing Kingdom ethics reflects the depth of human brokenness rather than any deficiency in Jesus' teaching. The study found that peacemaking becomes possible when understood as a Spirit-empowered vocation in which believers participate in God's reconciling mission through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.
 - viii. The theories of Kingdom Ethics and Conflict Transformation provide suitable frameworks for applying Matthew 5:9 in Northern Nigeria. Together, they demonstrate that lasting peace requires transformed individuals, restored relationships, just social structures, and communities shaped by the values of God's Kingdom.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding established that Matthew 5:9 presents peacemaking as an active Christian vocation rather than passive avoidance of conflict. The Greek term *eirēnopoioi* refers to those who intentionally make peace by restoring broken relationships and promoting justice and reconciliation. This understanding agrees with Glen Stassen and David Gushee, who view Jesus' ethical teachings as practical initiatives that interrupt cycles of violence. In Northern Nigeria, therefore, Christian peacemaking requires active engagement with hostility, mistrust, injustice, and broken relationships. The second finding shows that the Kingdom ethics of Jesus are radical but practicable. Although commands such as loving enemies, forgiving offenders, and rejecting retaliation appear difficult in violent circumstances, the study found that Jesus presents them as principles for Christian discipleship rather than unattainable ideals. John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King Jr. demonstrate in different ways that Christian discipleship requires concrete obedience to Jesus. The difficulty of Kingdom ethics therefore reflects the demanding nature of Christian discipleship rather than their irrelevance. Thirdly, the finding indicates that the major disagreement concerning Matthew 5:9 relates primarily to its application rather than its authority. Yoder, Hauerwas, Bonhoeffer, and King emphasize

the present responsibility of Christians to embody Jesus' peace ethic, while Martin Luther, John Calvin, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, and Reinhold Niebuhr qualify its application because of civil authority, human sinfulness, political responsibility, or eschatological considerations. This debate demonstrates the complexity of applying Jesus' teaching within a fallen and violent society.

Fourthly, the finding establishes that biblical peacemaking must integrate justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Genuine peace cannot be achieved by ignoring suffering or demanding forgiveness without truth and accountability. Miroslav Volf's understanding of reconciliation supports this position by emphasizing the importance of confronting wrongdoing while maintaining the possibility of restored relationships. Thus, Christian peace seeks restoration without denying justice. The fifth finding demonstrates that violence in Northern Nigeria is multidimensional. Historical grievances, political interests, ethnic tensions, economic competition, religious identities, and social inequalities interact in producing conflict. Consequently, peacebuilding must address both broken relationships and the structures that sustain violence. This corresponds with John Paul Lederach's emphasis on transforming relationships and social conditions rather than merely ending immediate violence. It is revealed in the sixth finding that the Church has an important role beyond preaching about peace. It is called to provide pastoral care, support victims, promote interfaith engagement, advocate justice, and facilitate reconciliation. The Church can therefore become a community that demonstrates the peace it proclaims. The seventh finding indicates that the difficulty of Kingdom ethics reflects human brokenness rather than a deficiency in Jesus' teaching. Peacemaking becomes possible through spiritual transformation, communal support, and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Finally, the eighth finding shows that Kingdom Ethics and Conflict Transformation Theory complement each other. Kingdom Ethics explains why Christians should pursue peace, while Conflict Transformation explains how relationships and structures can be transformed. Together, they provide an appropriate framework for applying Matthew 5:9 to the realities of prolonged conflict in Northern Nigeria.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Church should institutionalize peace education by integrating biblical peacemaking, reconciliation, and conflict transformation into theological education, discipleship programmes, and church leadership training.
2. Christian leaders should promote trauma-informed pastoral ministry that addresses the emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs of victims of violence before emphasizing forgiveness and reconciliation.
3. Churches should strengthen interfaith peace initiatives by collaborating with Muslim leaders and community organizations to build trust, promote dialogue, and undertake joint community development projects.
4. The Church should engage in prophetic advocacy by speaking against injustice, corruption, discrimination, and human rights abuses while promoting policies that foster equity, justice, and peaceful coexistence.
5. Christian communities should intentionally cultivate ministries of reconciliation, creating safe spaces for truth-telling, forgiveness, mediation, and the restoration of broken relationships.
6. Theological institutions should encourage contextual biblical scholarship that applies the teachings of Jesus to contemporary Nigerian realities, thereby equipping church leaders to respond biblically and practically to persistent violence.
7. Future research should undertake empirical studies involving church leaders, victims of violence, and peace practitioners to assess how Matthew 5:9 is understood and practiced within conflict-affected communities in Northern Nigeria.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined Jesus' declaration, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matt. 5:9), within the context of persistent violence and insecurity in Northern Nigeria. It has argued that the apparent impossibility of practicing Kingdom ethics in such a context does not expose a weakness in Jesus' teaching but rather reveals the radical nature of Christian discipleship. The historical-

grammatical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 demonstrates that the Greek term *eirēnopoioi* refers to those who actively create and restore peace rather than those who merely avoid conflict. Consequently, Christian peacemaking is an intentional vocation that reflects the character of God and the mission of His Kingdom. The study has further shown that the Kingdom ethics controversy revolves primarily around the applicability of Jesus' ethical teachings in a fallen world. While scholars such as John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer maintain that the Sermon on the Mount provides a normative pattern for Christian living, others such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, and Reinhold Niebuhr argue that its application must be understood in light of civil authority, human sinfulness, or eschatological expectation. Despite these differing perspectives, the study contends that Matthew 5:9 remains a binding ethical mandate for the Church, calling believers to pursue justice, reconciliation, and peace through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The conceptual and theoretical discussions also demonstrate that genuine peacemaking extends beyond the absence of violence. Biblical *shalom* embraces justice, reconciliation, wholeness, and restored relationships, while theories such as Kingdom Ethics and Conflict Transformation provide useful frameworks for understanding how Christian communities can become agents of reconciliation in divided societies. These perspectives reinforce the conviction that sustainable peace requires both spiritual renewal and the transformation of social relationships and structures.

In relation to Northern Nigeria, the study concludes that practicing Matthew 5:9 remains difficult because of recurring ethnoreligious conflicts, terrorism, banditry, political instability, and historical grievances. Nevertheless, these realities do not make Kingdom ethics irrelevant or impossible. Rather, they make the Church's peacemaking mission even more urgent. Through Spirit-empowered discipleship, trauma-sensitive ministry, truthful remembrance, interfaith engagement, advocacy for justice, and faithful witness, the Church can become an instrument of God's reconciling work within fractured communities. Ultimately, the Beatitude calls believers

not merely to admire peace but to create it. The Church is therefore called to embody God's Kingdom by pursuing justice without revenge, forgiveness without denying suffering, reconciliation without compromising truth, and peace without surrendering righteousness. In doing so, the Church bears faithful witness to the coming Kingdom of God and demonstrates that the peace ethic of Jesus remains both relevant and transformative for contemporary Northern Nigeria.

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