

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF GLOBAL TERRORISM: NIGERIA AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Events at the end are happening at a very high rate, creating an impression of a surge of masses toward a terrible destruction and collapse of the world government. Terrorists engage in increasingly violent, and high-profile attacks which include, rape, kidnapping, bombing of Churches and Mosques, military and paramilitary locations etc. including mass shooting to generate widespread fear on people. This paper presents the eschatological implications of global terrorism. Through an analytical study, this paper examines the terrorists activities in Nigeria and globally. This study discovers that terrorism is the calculated use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby to bring about a particular political objective as shown by the Fulani Jihadists in Nigeria whose interest has been on the ethnic cleansing and overall control of national government. On the other hand, a greater percentage of people have the notion that terrorism is religiously motivated as has been the case of Muslims against Christians. From the Christian perspective, terrorism is a fulfillment of the Scriptures. This is an 'End Time' sign which men do not have solutions to proffer. Global index of terrorism is an attestation to that. Nevertheless, the governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and religious bodies should continue to work out modalities to fight terrorism and ensure peace.

Introduction

The word eschatology was coined by Protestant theologians in the seventeenth century. It refers to the events of the last days or the last things, which may be either the end of the world or the end of the individual and that which follows it. There are four kinds of eschatology viz; political eschatology, which envisions a definitive kingdom or other form of society; cosmic eschatology, which envisions the end of this world and a new creation; personal eschatology, which is concerned with forms of afterlife; and realized eschatology, in which the definitive future state is anticipated in the present. Eschatology generally refers to the 'End Times'. While "end" here refers primarily to the end of human history, it is pertinent to note that New Testament eschatology makes this timeline more explicit than does Old Testament prophecy, which contains visions of something terminal that may be closer to the writer's time than the end of human history.

According to Ryken (2000), the Bible's images of the end are built around a cluster of time images. One of these is the image of "latter days," "last days" "the end" "Day of the Lord". While the details of sequence are not always clear in these references, Caird (1997) says they establish an important aspect of the Bible's view of history, namely, that it is moving in linear fashion to an appointed consummation. Weaver (2006) rightly points out that an eschatological orientation is central to the worldviews of Christians, Muslims, and Jews, and

for this reason, the search for a responsible eschatology is necessary in an age of terror and inter-religious violence.

Terrorism is generally viewed as political violence or the threat of violence, especially bombing, kidnapping and assassination, carried out for political purposes. In the perceptions of Jenkins (2004), definitions of terrorism are usually complex and controversial, and, because of the inherent ferocity and violence of terrorism, the term in its popular usage has developed an intense stigma. It was first coined in the 1790s to refer to the terror used during the French Revolution by the revolutionaries against their opponents. The Jacobin party of Maximilien Robespierre carried out a Reign of Terror involving mass executions by the guillotine. Although terrorism in this usage implies an act of violence by a state against its domestic enemies, since the 20th century the term has been applied most frequently to violence aimed, either directly or indirectly, at governments in an effort to influence policy or topple an existing regime.

In order to attract and maintain the publicity necessary to generate widespread fear, Jenkins (2004) notes that terrorists engage in increasingly dramatic, violent, and high-profile attacks. These have included different forms of hijackings, hostage takings, kidnappings, mass shootings, car bombings, and, frequently, suicide bombings. Although apparently random, the victims and locations of terrorist attacks often are carefully selected for their shock value. Schools, shopping centres, bus and train stations, restaurants and nightclubs have been targeted both because they attract large crowds and because they are places widely visited by members of the civilian population in which case they feel at ease. The goal of terrorism generally is to destroy the public's sense of security in the places most familiar to them. Major targets sometimes also include religious buildings or other locations that are important economic, political or security symbols, such as embassies, police posts or military installations. The hope of the terrorist is that the sense of terror these acts engender will induce the population to pressure political leaders toward a specific political end.

Global Terrorism and Eschatology

There are various terrorist organizations in the world today. The terrorist group known as 'Boko Haram' has been unleashing mayhem in Nigeria and neighboring countries since its inception. Boko Haram is a terrorist group founded in 2002 and its members have been active in Chad, Niger, Northern Cameroon and Nigeria. The founder is Mohammed Yusuf. Abubakar Shekau is the leader of this terror group from 2015 to 2021. The headquarter of this group is the Sambisa forest located in Borno State in Nigeria from March 2015 to May, 2021. Since 2015, the group has been aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

It is important to state in this paper how terrorism has become a global phenomenon. The growth of mass media according to Pillar (2001) has made news available to more people in more countries, heightening awareness of global terrorism and also speeding and spreading awareness of controversial, inflammatory events that might impel some people to violence. Pillar further submits that today's globalized terrorism is exemplified by Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, the mastermind of the 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center and later an abortive

plot to bomb a dozen U.S. airliners out of the sky in the Far East. Advances in communications and information technology have facilitated worldwide terrorist operations just as they have normal commerce. Satellite phones are now standard equipment for terrorist leaders, who can remain otherwise inaccessible while influencing events thousands of miles away. Terrorists also use the Internet for long-distance operational direction, with some larger groups using it for propaganda and conversion as well.

Often times, global terrorism is associated with End Times. Because an eschatological orientation is central to the worldviews of Christians, Muslims, and Jews, the search for a responsible eschatology is necessary in an age of terror and inter-religious violence. In addressing how religion functions as a motivator toward violence, Weaver (2006) states that Juergensmeyer identifies a number of factors, in which one can see how profoundly individual as well as communal apocalyptic thinking supports and justifies religious violence. On the same note, Juergensmeyer draws the conclusion that individuals justify violent acts by the belief that they are religious soldiers engaged in a cosmic battle that intersects with the present world.

It is the concern and wish of many to see the end of global terrorism which has become the order of the day. Scholars have raised a lot of questions regarding global terrorism and eschatology. The Bible sheds light on this eschatological phenomenon. Jesus' Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24–25 serves as a blueprint to the Bible's images of the end. When you look at recorded history, solid facts and figures, and visible proof in the world's current events right now in our lifetime, it is only rational that the Word of God is truth. Some 2,000 years ago Jesus gave us several specific events that would come to pass in our generation today, and they are actually happening and verifiable, and fulfilled exactly as He foretold. Shouldn't that convince you that Jesus' word is absolute truth and that our salvation is near?

i. Old Testament Eschatological Images

The second half of Daniel is an apocalyptic vision of the future in which images of the end figure prominently. Couched in the strange imagery of beasts and horns, the general pattern resembles New Testament images of the end. One motif is that of empires vying for power, conquering and succeeding each other, exerting themselves against God. Images of calamity, divine wrath and military destruction are pervasive: "they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder" (Dan 11:33 RSV). In the Book of Daniel, it is revealed that there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. Does this not paint the exact picture of terrorism in the end times which is being attested globally?

The prophecy of Zephaniah covers similar territory. It is a nightmarish vision of God's sweeping away everything from the earth. The slaughter of judgment that God has prepared is ironically pictured as a grand "sacrifice" to which God has "consecrated his guests". We read further that "a day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Zeph 1:15 RSV). Imagery of torture and mutilation is present in the picture of people's blood poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. God will make "sudden end" of all the

inhabitants of the earth. Productive land will be transformed into a desert (Zeph 2:13–15); battlements will be “in ruins” and streets “laid waste” (Zeph 3:6). All these imageries suggest that the end shall be full of terror.

ii. **New Testament Eschatological Images**

In a deep sense of concern, the disciples asked Jesus, “What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). It begins with the appearance of false christs and an era of warfare, earthquakes and famines, all of which are “but the beginning” of the sequence. “Then” will come a time of **tribulation** for Christians, accompanied by false prophets who will mislead many and by the worldwide proclamation of the gospel, “and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:9–14). “Then” will come a time of “great **tribulation**” and the appearance of false christs and false prophets who work signs and wonders. Tribulation here can be associated with terrorism. Hence, after the tribulation there will be cataclysmic destruction of natural forces as the sun is darkened, the moon fails to give its light and the stars fall from heaven. “Then” the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and Christ will send his angels to gather the elect from the earth. This is followed in Jesus’ discourse by a series of parables that have as their common point a final judgment of all people, climaxed by the judgment scene that is prefaced by the statement, “When the Son of man comes in his glory ... then he will sit on his glorious throne” (Mt 25:31–46). According to Chukwuedo (2019, p.182), “all the prophecies given in the Old Testament concerning the end times have begun in the first century and continues until the final coming of Christ.” Persecution of Jesus and his followers indicated the beginning of the tribulation.

Global terrorism is a nightmare vision of cosmic collapse, an equally violent disruption among people and nations, persecution for believers and spiritual deceitfulness and power by evil forces. The only positive note for Christians is the possibility of heroic endurance (“he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:13) and the certainty that at the very end Christ will appear as divine rescuer.

The book of Revelation also portrays in symbolic manner what will happen at the end of human history. Disaster in nature has as its counterpart disaster among people and nations. According to Bauckham (1993), terrorism as well as warfare is one image of social disintegration, as in the increasingly sinister sequence of four horse visions (Rev 6:1–8) or the destructive forces that are unloosed at the river Euphrates (Rev 9:13–19). More prevalent than war is the image of persecution of believers by forces of evil and images of torture. A related image pattern is the human toll that all this natural disaster takes on people in the form of pain and suffering.

The book of Revelation views disaster, violence and terrorism on earth as part of a process of divine judgment against a wicked human race. Indeed, the tumultuous events at the end of history are explicitly presented as the outworking of the wrath of God, and the events can therefore be interpreted as images of divine punishment against sinners. This, in turn, ties into the motif of angelic and demonic actors in the final events of history. On one side, we find an abundance of references in Revelation to angelic agents who are very busy carrying out

God's instructions and judgment and protecting the followers of the Lamb. On the other side are demonic figures—a dragon who is identified with Satan, beasts from the sea and from the earth, and “demonic spirits” (Rev 16:14). The main image pattern associated with both types of supernatural creatures is supernatural power over people. There is a major contrast between the revelation or unveiling in which the angels consistently engage and the elaborate powers of deception associated with the forces of demonic evil.

According to the visions in Revelation, the end times will be characterized by a great spiritual struggle between good and evil. This battle, Baukham (1993) presupposes will involve masses of both people and supernatural creatures. The book of Revelation paints a picture about a war in heaven; the dragon's war against the offspring of the woman, the church; the beast from the sea making war on the saints; the assembling of the kings of the earth at Armageddon; the armies of earth arrayed against Christ; and a final gathering of the nations as they “marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (Rev 20:7–9). While all of these motifs characterize the end times generally, at the *very* end of history stands a final judgment, a time of transition in which evildoers descend to hell and believers enter an eternity of bliss in heaven. In Jesus' Olivet Discourse this judgment is pictured in a series of parables and in the awe-inspiring judgment scene in which God divides the sheep from the goats. Other images of final judgment occur at memorable junctures in the book of Revelation—in the vision of the winepress of God's wrath (Rev 14:17–20), in the doom of Babylon (Rev 14:18), in the casting of the two demonic beasts into the lake of fire (Rev 19:20), in the scene of the great white throne (Rev 20:11–14).

While some eschatological passages depict a gradual process of disintegration, a complementary motif stresses the unexpected suddenness with which events at the very end will happen. Thus Jesus speaks of the Son's coming suddenly and of the final day coming “upon you suddenly like a snare” (Luke 21:34), while Paul speaks of “sudden destruction” (1 Thess 5:3). The most frequent New Testament image is that of a thief that comes unexpectedly in the night (Mt 24:43; Lk 12:39).

Brower and Elliot (1997) explain that one of the most haunting eschatological images is that of “the mystery of lawlessness” and “the lawless one” that will appear (2 Thess 2:7–9). Earlier in that same passage Paul speaks of “the man of lawlessness” as the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship. The picture that emerges is of a total collapse of moral standards as society preys upon itself and creates a totally secular entity. John gives us a similar image in the figure of the antichrist(s) (1 Jn 2:18, 22; 2 Jn 1:7), associated like the lawless one with spiritual deception of people.

Two epistles give a hint about life in the end times. One is 1 Thessalonians 5, where believers are commanded to live differently from their surrounding culture, which is characterized by the imagery of darkness and debauchery. The other is 2 Peter 3, a small classic on how to live in the last days. Here the degenerate cultural situation is described as a time of scoffing about the return of Christ and of people following their own lusts.

A final striking image of the end is the picture Peter paints of the final large destructive fire. Nothing in Revelation is quite as decisive as this picture of the very end of earthly existence:

“The heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.... The heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!” (2 Pet 3:10, 12 RSV). One can deduce from the Old Testament passages and New Testament texts that terrorism is one of the events that will mark the end of the age. Terrorism will come to an end when the earth shall pass away.

Terrorism in Nigeria

One is tempted to ask if terrorism in Nigeria is politically or religiously motivated. Is militant Islamization a mark of the End Time? Dudley (2021) says Nigeria accounted for 13% of all terrorist-related deaths globally in 2018, with a 33 percent rise in the number of fatalities compared to the year before – that translates into 2,040 deaths and 772 injuries from the 562 terrorist incidents. Despite that rise, the total number of deaths was still 72% below the peak in 2014.

The Islamic terrorist group, Boko Haram is known for their brutality. Thousands of people have lost their lives owing to the attacks from the group which has also displaced 2.3 million people from their homes, especially Christian communities. The Global Terrorist Index reckons them at one time as the world’s deadliest terror group. In 2009, according to the *Guardian* more than one thousand Christians were killed in Maiduguri, Bauchi, Potiskum and Wudil for refusing to convert to Islam. On 25th December, 2011, more than 41 persons lost their lives when Muslim militants bombed a Catholic Church during Christmas mass. Boko Haram killed over 6,600 people in 2014. The group has carried out mass abductions including the kidnapping of 276 school girls from Chibok in April, 2014. Attacks by Boko Haram, Miyetti Allah and Fulani Herdsmen in the guise of Jihad and Islamization pose a major threat to Christians in Nigeria and the society in general. People are killed on daily basis in Nigeria today. It appears that Christianity is always opposed right from its inception. Jesus himself was opposed and at the end lost his life in the hands of fellow men.

Terrorism has taken different shapes in Nigeria. The first major terrorist attack was carried out through bombings. Today, it has degenerated into hostage takings, kidnappings, mass shooting, bombing, massacre of communities and bombing. The news that is being heard in the country according to Dudley (2021) is that the deadliest Jihadist group, Boko Haram, continues to be put under pressure by a multinational task force set up by the government of Nigeria with assistance from Cameroon, Chad and Niger and, as a result, it was responsible for fewer deaths last year than the year before. However, the danger from Fulani Jihadists/Herdsmen is rising. The increase in deaths across the country in 2018 was a result of extremist Fulani groups who have become more active and were responsible for 1,158 deaths last year (compared to 589 for Boko Haram). Boko Haram and the various Fulani groups accounted for 78% of attacks and 86% of terrorist deaths in 2019 to 2021.

The Eschatological Implications of Terrorism

While the Bible's apocalyptic images of the future mingle pessimism and hope, the hope belongs to events that either transcend or follow the end of earthly history. The end times portray the proverbial doomsday. For unbelievers there is no hope at all. For believers the only hope is that of heroic endurance to the end and intervening rescue by Christ to a heavenly reward.

Two main principles underlie the Bible's images of the end. One is their cosmic scope. Green (1984) says that prophecies of the end times are not stories of individuals but of natural forces and nations, both political and spiritual. Events at the end are happening on a huge scale, creating an impression of a stampede of masses toward a terrible destruction. The second pattern is that the images of the end are predominantly images of terror- earthquakes, floods, invading armies, demonic forces and the suddenness with which they inflict destruction on the earth. The major lessons that these visions of the end teach are the predictable spread of evil, the certainty of God's wrath and judgment against evil, the need for endurance and a stance of preparedness for what is coming.

The emphasis on global terrorism and eschatology forestalls the mutual reinforcement between terroristic practice and a growing culture of fear. Weilder (2013) posits that terrorism can manifest in a variety of ways. One of its most disturbing features across the board, however, is its diabolical presumptuousness, namely, an 'extra-moral' sense of entitlement toward sacrificing the innocent. From the critic's perspective, what makes the immorality of terrorists hard to pin down is that their horrific performance tends to defy moral discourse altogether.

As instances of religious terrorism and terrorist groups have increased to account for nearly fifty percent of all known international terrorist organizations, people of faith are required to give an accounting of our beliefs in light of the undeniable fact of violence carried out in the name of religion. Their actions are not only justified by their religious worldview but – to the other pole—rewarded by the heavenly promise of an excellent afterlife that far exceeds merits and rewards that could be attained in the present world. This assertion is what makes terrorism uncontrollable.

In his book, *When Religion becomes Evil* (2002), says that religion is not the chief cause of terrorism but can be held responsible. Hence, religion can be held responsible when it makes absolute truth claims; requires blind obedience to texts, leaders, and doctrines; establishes an ideal time; allows the ends to justify any means necessary; and declares Holy War. In the minds of critical thinkers like Hoffman (1998), apocalyptic, eschatological thinking consistently justifies, sanctifies, and even mandates religious violence. Terrorists often times describe persons outside the terrorists' religious community in denigrating and dehumanizing terms, such as 'infidels,' 'dogs,' 'children of Satan,' 'mud people' etc.

Shahid (2005) posits that the Islamic sacred texts were influenced by cross-cultural and religious pollination between Judaism, mainstream and Gnostic-Christianities, and Zoroastrianism. He further says:

To illustrate, the suicidal activities of radical Muslims are basically inspired by the rewards the Islamic paradise offers that are not available to them in this life. This incentive was and is still the force behind this suicidal impediments, as Muslims believe in a literal description of the Qur'anic paradise; the utopia that is yet to come. Yet the majority of Muslims do not realize that the images of their paradise are reflections of the Zoroastrian paradise and the appealing of the sensual pleasure inflames their desire to die for the cause of Allah. What will be the reaction of these radical Muslims if they realize that their paradise is just an echo of the Zoroastrian paradise? Would they sacrifice their lives for a mirage or an illusion? Undoubtedly there is a heaven, but of a different type. It is a righteous and not a sensual heaven that perpetually enkindles the passions and desires of the flesh (p.253).

It is irrational to think that the end could be brought about through violence, strategized and coordinated killings. Christians who feel marginalized take solace in the belief that the end is imminent when Christ shall rapture the saints. It is clear that the early Christians passed through unbearable persecutions. Terrorism which is the height of persecution has been from time immemorial. However, a righteous living will earn one a place in paradise.

Conclusion

It has been established in most religious circles that global terrorism is associated with end times. This notion cuts across Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Jews are comforted by the belief that a promised Messiah is coming who will restore the kingdom to Israel, who will destroy their enemies, restore peace and take them into the Promised Land. It is upheld by most Christians, that global terrorism is an indication that the end is near when the Son of man shall appear in glory and bring all persecutions to an end. Terrorism reminds the Christians of the *parousia* and the judgment of all nations by the king. Islam has the notion that the infidels should be completely wiped off from the surface of the earth. In attempting the proper societal and personal preparation for Day of Judgment, Muslims have engaged in the struggle to show submission to the will of *Allah* which involves spiritual, mental, and social disciplines communicated by the term *jihad*. Among the types of struggle according to Weaver (2006) is military clash of arms—a struggle sanctified in the Qu'ran and exploited by marginalized Muslims today.

Weaver says, “For an eschatology to be responsible, it must work towards building the future through the present commitment to resistance, attentiveness, and solidarity” (2006, p.17).

The obvious lesson to draw from the increasingly transnational character of terrorism is that counter terrorism efforts must be as globalized as the terrorists themselves. A comparative study of religious violence reveals that an apocalyptic imagination lies at the heart of religiously motivated violence across the board. This means that religion cannot be exonerated as a contributor to violence. Christians take comfort in the apocalyptic promise of

a new world to come—a world in which the powers of good overcome the tangible evil of this world once and for all.

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