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Dangerous Memories and Violence

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Abstract: The big challenge regarding social violence is relationships and the quest for societies to live together. As a result, this has affected, in different ways, how various demographics are composed, economies are built and religions are practiced. This investigation weighs in on these matters to delineate the issues critically. It spotlights the thrust of the matter, which is based on trust and fairness. Adopting a categorical theological method, this article interrogates Johann Baptist Metz's categories of memory, solidarity and narratives in reverse. It highlights relationships, narratives and community to dissect the issues of violence in Taraba State with the intention of restoring relationships. Conflicts result from a series of broken relationships, and they become ethnic and religious. In intentionally engaging these categories, the hope is that they serve as a formidable resource for interrogating these conflicts and providing a reset for healthy living.

Keywords: memoria passionis; herdsmen; filiations

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1. Introduction

Identity and experience are shaped by relationships, which, in turn, may be understood in light of scripture and tradition. God's self-revelation can be only in relationships, because God reveals God's self as a Trinitarian community of persons. The Synod of Bishops' Second Special Assembly for Africa decried the situation of poor relations among followers of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions, citing distrust and rivalries between these groups. This article acknowledges that mistrust on all sides hinders peaceful dialogue and mutual understanding (Synod of Bishops 2009, p. 54) in places like Taraba State, Nigeria. The question now is how do people build this trusting relationship? This question forms the hub of this paper.

2. Taraba and Johann Baptist Metz

Christians living in Taraba State in Nigeria are constantly caught in a wave of attacks and disruption. There are frequent flights bordering on disturbance and the fear of being killed by organized militias or religious fanatics. This situation is compounded because the state security apparatus is helpless in providing safety for such a vast land like Taraba. This unrest has led to a series of interventions on the part of the state and federal government charged with the provision of security. But, lacking in the advanced technologies needed to fight these crimes, Christians, who form a single majority in the state, are left at the mercy of their God for protection. Although the state and federal government continue to maintain that they have these situations under control, it is evident that the communities in Taraba are not safe and are frequently under attack by armed men. Being a state that is mostly rural and heavily forested, it is a safe haven for these armed groups to exist and create havoc. The state is composed of mostly farmers. They live on these farms and cultivate the land. There are seasonal clashes between farmers regarding, for example, waterfronts,

where herders want to water their cattle and farmers want to cultivate these lands and plant seeds. A further element is that one group of farmers, cattle herders, is predominately Muslim, and the other group is predominantly Christian. When these relationships are broken, it leads to serious clashes and takes on different dimensions. Once fighting breaks out, it is sometimes referred to as clashes between farmers and herders; at other times, it is between settlers and migrants or Christian and Muslims. It is this constant reduction in the stakes and in crises that is a challenge for the people in Taraba. This has led to the loss of countless lives, the destruction of communities, the displacement of people and the breakdown of relationships. This is simply tragic and discomforting.

Finding ways to address this situation calls for critical thinking. A consequential interlocutor in the investigation is Johann Baptist Metz. His theology speaks to the threatened future of humankind with a biblically sharpened view of the world. It is believed that his 'new political theology' is an 'attempt to speak of God facing the world.' Again, his theology of the real world is a theology that, at its intellectual root, sees the history of human suffering in the world (Metz 2025). As a result, Metz developed his theology of dangerous memories primarily in order to articulate hope in situations that human beings experience as hopeless (Organ 2017, p. 12). Through a method of see, judge and act, and having been informed by the events of the Holocaust, his thought-provoking questions and analyses place compassion in the foreground, challenging the church to connect with the suffering of others (Metz 2025). Metz also examines these relations in categories of memory, solidarity and narratives. I find these categories to be very provocative and at the intersection of this investigation. However, I believe they are extremely helpful if leveraged with respect to relationships, narrative and community. They can provide vital insights for navigating these complexities effectively. In this way, the categories address the consequential themes of relations that are at a crossroads, in Taraba and elsewhere.

3. Johann Baptist Metz's Approach

By adopting his approach to tackle the themes of trust and relationships, we can confront the ethno-religious crisis in Taraba and across the world. However, "Metz insists that we have a duty as theologians to face into the storms of our broken world. More than that, he insists that in the cries of the suffering we have an additional source of intellectual criteria for theological reasoning; the cries interrupt the closed flow of ideas and systematic argument" (Metz 2014, p. 24). This interaction draws and benefits from the cries, pains and stories of sufferings that emerge from the crisis in Taraba. Perhaps more profoundly along this line is to "insist that a Christian political theology must ask questions about human dignity and suffering in any and all situations and theories. Who is hurt? Who will suffer? Who will be invisible?" (Metz 2014, p. 24).

In this way, Metz's approach is illuminating and the critical piece for interrogating the situation in Taraba. The approach is empowering, as it helps to reclaim a legacy specific to dialogue during crisis. Above all, his theology is a practical fundamental theology of the world: a political theology that values not fixed systems of theory but rather concrete narratives of human suffering. It calls not for a better theory to mediate human and religious experience but rather for a transformative praxis. These are among the parameters of his theological thinking. But he does not tell us what to decide or which ethics or economics to hold; he simply says that our theological reasoning must also attend to the reality of human suffering. In other words, theological reasoning presumes an a priori of human suffering to be redeemed; the touchstone for theological analysis and construction today is a memoria passionis, an engaged compassion (Metz 2014, p. 24). Therefore, this analysis will proceed with this approach and objective in mind.

4. Dangerous Memories and Relationships

Metz's understanding of relationships speaks to the last two decades of both ethno-religious tensions and public relations in Taraba State, Nigeria. Interests in relationships have soared because of the culture of dissent that is palpable, and the deepest concern is to maintain and enhance the relationship between different ethnic groups and affiliations and to collaborate on future outcomes in conflict situations. Nearly all relationships evoke judgments of fairness at some point: at work, people are concerned with the fairness of pay; at home, couples are concerned with the fairness of household responsibilities; in school, students are concerned with the fairness of grades; and in the marketplace, consumers are concerned with the fairness of transactions. Acts of perceived unfairness in turn put tremendous pressure on relationships: perceived fairness is a central element of maintaining relationships with others (Aggarwal and Larrick 2012, p. 115).

Lack of fairness evokes the dangerous memory of past injustices among the unprivileged tribal groups in Taraba. In the process of expressing their grievances, they often times take to armed violent protests. The experiences resulting from constant clashes, friction, tension, and destructions in Taraba evoke the dangerous memories underscored in Metz political theology: "Thanks to the dangerous memory, reality is unmasked and people finally admit things are not as they should or could be. Then they can take collective action to heal the brokenness in their current situation" (Spellers 2010, p. 42). Metz argues that "these memories are dangerous because they draw our attention to human suffering in the past, and therefore wake us from our everyday slumbering, and disturb us in our ingrained evolutionary time, according to which things are going on just as usual" (Dahlbacka 2016, pp. 27–28). Often, the government looks the other way round as the Muslim Fulani pastoralists continue to kill innocent Christian agriculturalists, many of whom are forgotten. This is where Metz's recalling of the dangerous memory of their situation becomes important to stimulate the consciousness of society to the atrocities around the place.

In particular, Metz's presentation of memory attempts to retrieve the memory of those who have suffered and died. Such a retrieval is not just a psychological or anthropological recognition of the subject (Ryan 2016, p. 908). Rather, Metz expands on the *memoria passionis*, the memory of suffering, which is a criterion for survival: it is a dangerous memory that spurs someone to strive harder to rise above the present situation. The *memoria passionis* is important because one ties one's suffering to the sufferings of Jesus and finds meaning in God.

To the Christian, the memory of suffering is dangerous because it warns us where things have gone wrong and challenges our comfort in the official story. The memory of suffering, our own and especially that of others connects each with the other and provides a practical warming system about distorted relationships, institutions and situations (Downey 1999, p. 8). In his analysis of the moral significance of the *memoria passionis*, Metz argues that it is critical that the appeal to the memoria passionis involves not only the call for the remembrance of the past suffering of one's own culture but also the suffering experienced in other cultures and even the suffering of one's enemies. Where a fixation on the history of suffering in one's own culture often leads to hatred and violence, Metz argues that the remembrance of the suffering of one's enemies represents the only legitimate path toward an authentic politics of peace (Eggemeier 2012, p. 460). This is hardly surprising, because ultimately for Metz, certain memories, the memories of injustice and defeat, have the capacity to preserve the identity of the subjects of suffering, especially those long dead. These are "dangerous memories" which call into question the record of the victors in history and which do not allow the stories of the victims to be silenced. Such dangerous memories challenge us to eradicate present suffering, as they disclose the hope of a future without suffering (Vento 2002, p. 9).

God has created humanity for greatness; however, "Human beings can rise to great heights or sink to deep lows" (Brundell 2011, p. 1). Continuous conflicts with massive murders and the wanton destruction of property in Taraba shows humanity as its lowest ebb. Taraba State has become a jungle where the phrase 'animal eats animal' is reigning. The ever-increasing wave of ethno-religious violence attests to this. Unfortunately, it is not only Taraba: in fact, the whole of the Nigerian nation state appears to be in the same quagmire. How would Metz theology address this situation? From a practical theological approach, the three terms of Metz categories—memory, solidarity and narratives—reversed here for critical examination to relationships, narratives and community come into focus as important categories in restoring broken relationships in Taraba. Therefore, considering these categories in depth and building on the composition of the people in Taraba, Metz categories will respond to the ethnic and religious crisis. Metz's categories and theological approach are a good resource for engaging complicated broken relationships that may result into serious violent conflicts. The point is behind these violent conflicts exists the image of a God who is intimately tied to human relationships, including hostile encounters (Juergensmeyer and Kitts 2011, p. 7). Metz has memorably described the Christian faith in terms of the critical liberating memory of Jesus Christ. "Against a technologically rationalized society which is becoming more 'history-less' and 'tradition-less,' Metz proposes an interpretation of the Christian faith as a dangerous memory which breaks through the prevailing consciousness and undermines its compliancy" (Henson 1999, p. 65). In specific terms, the Christian faith must be willing and ready to live out its demands in the face of critical challenges affecting Christians.

As mentioned earlier, for Metz the three fundamental categories of his theology are 'memory, solidarity and narratives' (Downey 1999, p. 8). Possibly, "Metz's political theology provides the lenses of memory, of solidarity and of narratives so that we can look at our world and act in ways that bring more abundant life" (Downey 1999, p. 8). Perhaps a critical fact is "these are haunting memories of the world-as-it-should-be, and they stand in stark relief against the pain of the world-as-it-is" (Spellers 2010, p. 42). Such contrasts and twists set up an interest in this unfolding drama: ethno-religious violence in Taraba. Since relationships touch on cultures, Metz interjects that politics is actually the new name for culture, and in this sense too, any theology which tries to reflect on Christian traditions in the context of world problems and to bring about the process of transference between the kingdom of God and society is a political theology (Metz 1981, p. 102). However, to effectively interrogate ethno-religious violence in Taraba, these categories are reversed in conversation with similar but distinct categories: relationship, narratives and community. Such exchange is particularly helpful, because it is only by concretely calling this situation by what it is can it be addressed.

The Vanguard, a Nigerian newspaper, recently highlighted the heightening tension between Muslim Fulani pastoralists and Christian agriculturalists in Taraba.[1] The largely agrarian Christian communities maintain that the Muslim Fulani herdsmen are engaged in a prolonged battle to take land from them, the so-called indigenous people. Fulanis, on the other hand, claim that they face discrimination and are deprived of basic rights, including access to land, education and political offices, despite having lived in the area for generations (Vanguard 2016). Here comes the issue of unfairness as a spring board for injustice that often leads to crises in Taraba.

The apparent situation in Taraba is particularly dramatic, since the ongoing clashes with the Fulani herdsmen have led to instability with increasing death tolls. What amazes an observer is the spontaneity of the crises. For instance, in December 2016, a few hours after an abrupt violent crisis erupted, "eighteen people . . . [were] feared killed and many others [were reportedly] missing in a violent clash between Tiv's and Fulani's in Sabon

Gidan village of Dan Anacha town in Gassol Local Council of Taraba State" (Akpeji 2016). News reports from the area said the crisis started when two dead bodies (corpses) of the Fulanis were found in a nearby bush. This triggered alleged reprisal attacks on the Tivs. A resident of the area said he counted about twenty bodies that were allegedly killed in the early hours of the first day of the crisis (Akpeji 2016). As the second day went by, the crisis spread to neighboring villages and towns involving other tribes as well. It was gathered that "no fewer than fifty people, including a soldier, were reportedly killed and several others injured in Wukari, the headquarters of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State . . ., following a bloody clash between the Fulani herdsmen and Jukuns in the area. Places of worships were among several buildings that were burnt by the belligerent groups" (Vanguard 2014). Actions such as these have become a constant in Taraba; it generates fear which in turn breeds dissent, confrontation and embittered memories. Embittered memories affect the human spirit.

This is the fact of the matter: "It is these experiences that cause one to face the rawness and harshness of reality while moving from insobriety to stupor. Pain, suffering and death cause one to question the reality of God and the meaning of life. These experiences, in the depths of their depravity, derangement and obscenity, drain the human spirit of all that is good, leaving it languishing and desperate for any scent of hope. It is at this threshold between despair and hope where Metz looks to the Christian kerygma to speak a good word to a wounded and numb humanity" (Wallenfang 2009, pp. 7–8).

Repeated clashes in ethnic and religious crises in Taraba are changing and redrawing the way life is lived. This developing climate invites interrogation. The landscapes are redrawn and relationships are mapped and shaped in different negative directions, which means "in brief, memory can creatively interrupt the present and in doing so has the capacity to awaken hope in alternative styles of individual and social existence" (Lane 1999, p. 332). This extreme form of memory corroborates Metz's position that "human beings are a result not only of their genes but also of their histories. If they want to understand who they are, humans need not only to experiment with themselves but also to allow themselves to be told something" (Metz 2014, p. 31). They serve as grounds for not only constructive and critical response but "on the contrary, . . .[they try] to carry out the speaking about God by making the connection between the Christian message and the modern world visible and expressing the Christian tradition in this world as a dangerous memory" (Metz 1981, p. 89). Metz emphasizes, "the memory of suffering as a category of political theology is primarily the memory of neighbors' suffering rather than mine. However, there is always a distorted form of dangerous memory, which identifies the memory of suffering with my tragic experience" (Kim 2013, p. 332). When we remember the history of suffering, therefore, an appeal to universal freedom, justice, and rights for all human beings is needed to prevent our suffering from turning into a political weapon to attack others (Kim 2013, p. 332).

Human relationships are encountered as dangerous memories in the ethno-religious crisis of Taraba on two levels: on the one hand, these encounters serve as the current 'lived experiences' of victims and perpetrators of these acts; they are visible realities, painful, and lived. At the same time, victims and perpetrators of these actions are the living proof of the vulnerability and destruction of such actions. They carry with them the bitter struggles for understanding and relevance which their current situation represents and presents. "These subjects have an identity gained through the memories of sufferings, memories decisively represented in the memory of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ" (Chopp 1986, p. 65). Metz forces us to understand that what is needed is not just more generosity on the part of the bourgeoisie, not just increased production or better understanding, but rather a total conversion of who we are and how we live in history (Chopp 1986, pp. 80–81).

Dangerous memories offer a critical constructive frame that interprets the consequences of broken relationships and takes responsibility for the continuous breakdown of relationships in ethno-religious relations in Taraba. Dangerous memories would provide a vision for transforming ethno-religious relations in Taraba. The memory of suffering serves a twofold purpose. Firstly, it reminds us that suffering is part of the human condition and that it cannot be ignored. Secondly, the remembrance of suffering should lead us to 'analyze the causes of suffering, a step necessary for developing political strategies of resistance'. Hence, the memory of suffering is dangerous memory, because it prompts resistance and social change (Holtschneider 2003, p. 4).

5. Dangerous Memories and Social Change

Dangerous memories are not a particular kind or function of memory that can be isolated and defined; rather, they are a disruptive practice of and from memory. In a sense, then, any memory can become dangerous when it resists the prevailing historical narratives. Consequently, dangerous memories are neither simply individual nor collective but political in the sense that they involve power relations, revealing the patterns of violence and suffering at work. Furthermore, dangerous memories may constitute new affective economies that inspire solidarity through the memory of suffering (Bekermanzvi 2008, pp. 124–54). In keeping with this, Metz, who was deeply influenced by Walter Benjamin, argues that history is not the total sum of the actions and the interpretations of the victors but, rather, the reality of the sufferings of human victims (Chopp 1986, p. 74). In a sense, therefore, the best way to keep alert to the dangers of ideology and neurosis may well be to keep in mind what Walter Benjamin has so aptly called dangerous memories: namely, remembrance of the dead, those who suffered and were defeated (ideologies and neuroses have the obsessive outlook of those determined to be winners). Most dangerous are the memories of the evils we have committed or the costs we did not or could not correct (Dodaro 1995, p. 49).

In a way, Metz's 'theory of action' innovatively occasions a 'transformation', which 'entails recognizing the capacity for guilt in all acting subjects'. It is this inclusion of guilt in how one understands memory that locates Metz's presentation of memory as distinctive. Indeed, the capacity for guilt is not so much a record of sin or offence committed, but the capacity for guilt ought to move the Christian toward a greater action of concern and compassion (Ryan 2016, p. 909). This notion of dangerous memory is embodied in the Christian concept of love, which is exemplified in the selfless and unconditional life offering of Christ on the cross. This love is essentially freedom from the domination of humans over fellow humans. This is what motivated Christ to identify himself with the poor and oppressed to vigorously proclaim the promised justice, peace, and freedom for all (Henson 1999, p. 65). Such an understanding becomes an avenue for critical and constructive engagement, since memory challenges us to move forward and establish strong connections between memory and truth, because selective or false memories can become oppressive ideologies in the future. The drive for memory helps recover the narratives of those who have suffered unjustly (Uwineza 2016, p. 53).

When one considers the origin and the concept of memory from its Hebraic roots, it is called Zakhor, which is striking and means not only "you will remember" but "you will continue to tell", to recount, to testify (Uwineza 2016, p. 52). In this case, memory is instrumental in the formation of human identity, and a number of scholars have argued for its significance. The fact is to be human is to be marked by our capacity to remember (Uwineza 2016, p. 52). Significantly, "man becomes subject through memory, which is the reason for memory being of such crucial importance to his existence throughout the time

during which he sees himself as a conscious being" (Ricœur 1986, p. 72). This moves people to want to take control of their histories and create history through processes of change.

Memory then bears the responsibility of self-contemplation and self-expression. However, individuals often suppose that they know the history of the ethnic, religious, and national groups to which they belong. Their historical memories include details and interpretations of past events that they did not personally experience. These historical memories are to group identity what personal memories are to individual identity. Similarly, historical memory as such is the glue that connects group members, events, and ideas through time and space. Regardless of their accuracy, historical memories provide the bases of people's understanding of the origins, story, and characteristics of a group. Historical memories help establish and support individuals' beliefs about their group's uniqueness and standing relative to other groups (Rezarta and Ross 2012, p. 123). This is what implicates relationships among the ethnic groups of Taraba State.

Memory, therefore, contributes to our disposition and interpretation of the world. Metz argues, "the memory of human suffering forces us to look at the public not merely from the standpoint of the successful and the established, from that of the conquered and the victims" (Metz 1981, p. 105). The past of the victims is full of meaning because it is recognized as an injustice that questions the present. These are dangerous memories because they visit the present and question it. These could be subversive memories with a liberating message for the future. It is necessary, therefore, to take a look at the vanquished and the defeated in history and develop a kind of anti-history (Manuel and Mandalios 2014, p. 18). It also includes critical measures that must be taken in order to stand in continuity with the dangerous memories and the subjugated knowledge in and behind the biblical text (Cochrane and West 1993, p. 28).

By retrieving these memories, a more constructive path will open for constructing better relations in ethno-religious conflicts in Taraba. Taraba underscores these memories as illustrated by the heightened incidences of provocations after attacks carried out on victims whose lives are destroyed and communities displaced. As if such tragedies are not enough, matters are complicated when the burial of these victims is subsequently challenged. An incidence took place in a particular local government area of Taraba. A group recently conducting an investigation in an area that had been heavily attacked and destroyed received a letter written by a particular traditional leader in Bali LGA [Local Government Area], stopping the burial of Utsua Daar, a 103-year-old Christian victim killed during the recent Hausa–Fulani Muslim herdsmen attack. The burial was denied on the grounds that the deceased was an infidel and did not belong to the area. Thus, even in death, Christians are rejected in the area. And yet the deceased Utsua Daar was said to have been born and brought up in the area long before the chief in question was born. This opens up a new chapter in the whole crisis (Adamu and Ben 2015, p. 58).

Such incidences which are popular at the moment in Taraba invoke memories that are disruptive because they call for solidarity with others on the basis of common human suffering. These kinds of disruptions, says Metz, count as dangerous memories when we remember events of the past that question our consciences and assumed horizons; "dangerous," then, takes the meaning of challenging, critical, and hopeful. Such memories function in ways that make us re-collect and re-configure individual and collective consciousness into a new process of narrativization: re-claiming forgotten connections with others in ways that involve acts of compassion, self-criticality and resistance to the status quo (Bekermanzvi 2008, pp. 124–54). These examples show how memory, in particular in the context of remembering the horrors of the past, is one instrument to pave the way for strengthening a group's sense of identity and unity (Ricœur 1986, p. 71).

The dangerous memories call to mind the different fault lines that have befallen us and lead to our silence in many cases. To this end, Metz suggests a global program for Christianity under the heading of compassion, which may be understood not as a somewhat vague empathy, not as an inconsequential pity, not as a philanthropic sentiment, but as a participatory awareness of the strangers' suffering, as an active remembrance of the suffering other (Metz 2014, p. 30). The memory of suffering provides much fodder for theological and ethical reflection on difficult questions such as how Christians should remember, and it is imperative to warn against the potentially destructive abuses of memory which engender hatred and violence (Gandolfo 2013, p. 64). In concrete terms, the atrocities carried out by Fulani herdsmen in Taraba garbed in violence is specifically targeted based on gender, religion and ethnicity, which destroy relationships. It is regrettable to observe the following:

Four attacks were carried out, and in these attacks, Christian women and children were specifically targeted. The killing of Christian women constituted about twenty five percent of the violence, the destruction of business properties and shops belonging to Christian women made up about thirty seven percent, injuries sustained by Christian women and children constituted twenty two percent, and the killing of children accounted for twelve percent of the violence (Barkindo et al. 2013, p. 28).

What seems novel is that Metz's understanding of the Christian response to suffering is rooted in his approach to theological anthropology, particularly his understanding of sin and grace. He notes that "the biblical traditions know a particular type of universal responsibility, which, contrary to mainstream theological approaches, is not primarily directed toward the universalism of sin and failure but rather toward the universalism of suffering in the world" (Baumgardt 2012, p. 122). As Metz observes, 'Jesus didn't look first to the sin of others but to the suffering of others. To him sin was above all a refusal to participate in the suffering of others, a refusal to see beyond one's own history of suffering'. In light of the fact that the Christian community originated as 'a community of memory and narrative in imitation of Jesus', 'its primary task was to attend to 'the suffering of others'. Therefore, for Metz, sin is to close one's eyes to the suffering of our neighbors (Baumgardt 2012, p. 122) who weep innocently for help.

6. The Cry of the Innocent

The fact is "memory has a deeply religious significance" (Thesnaar 2011b, p. 533). The bitter memories of a people can be suppressed or repressed. They cannot be erased or buried without account. Nor can they be healed by suppressing or repressing them. The lack of healing, particularly if the memories are sufficiently intense and extensive, will engender not only personal brokenness but social brokenness (Cochrane and West 1993, p. 25). The constant killings and displacement of communities in Taraba by Fulani herdsmen bear this out as personal tragedies and bitter encounters are narrated. When recounted, it is painful and unpleasant. Metz insists that the memory of Christ's identification with the oppressed and rejected and his announcement of the coming Kingdom of God still have a liberating and redemptive power that can impact upon our present. The remembered freedom of Jesus and his Kingdom is dangerous within our present world because it "anticipates the future as a future of those who are oppressed, without hope and doomed to fail" (Marsden 2010, p. 445). In Taraba, a place where ethnic and religious tensions have polarized the community and displaced many makes an interesting case. Questions of social inequality and injustice are of profound interest and involved a desire for them to be answered, for all too often, they are found to co-exist with the suffering of the innocent (Stringer 2003, p. 52).

Engaging the cries of those caught in the thick of this crisis from a Judeo-Christian perspective is critical. Many instances in scriptures and church practices reveal a God who

is involved in the affairs of the people. The Old Testament presents a God who takes sides in battle and avenges on their behalf. While in the New Testament, Christians remember the slavery of the Hebrews in Egypt, the exile of Israel in Babylon, the massacre of the Holy Innocents, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the suffering of the early Christian martyrs. However, the Christian tradition always and only remembers these sufferings in relation to the hope-filled promises of the Exodus, the return from exile, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection. Thus, Christian memory of suffering is always linked to hope for and the promise of a future in which suffering will be no more (Gandolfo 2013, p. 63). In a sense, cries for vengeance by those who have been persecuted to the point of death are a common theme in Jewish and Christian literature. Often, they are combined with a prayer requesting retaliation for the murder of the righteous. Examples of such prayers can be found in 2 Maccabees 8:2–4; Revelation 6:9–11. Common to these prayers is the mention of either shed blood or blood crying out and the demand that God avenge the death of the righteous (Byron 2011, p. 747). In effect, relationships are deeply compromised and completely obliterated.

What is most interesting is as members of a silenced, marginalized and sometimes ignored race discover the silenced, ignored and marginalized people in the scriptures and develop an affinity with them, they also discover a text that has been silenced but one that speaks through this silence about the struggles of the silenced and marginalized people of the Bible. This occurs because their physical and psychological scars together with the analytical tools they have chosen enable them, a people whose story of pain, fears and hopes have been suppressed, to discover the suppressed and forgotten stories of the weak and the poor of the Bible. These stories are interpreted by them as God identifying with the forgotten and the weak and God retrieving them from the margins of the social world (Cochrane and West 1993, p. 30). Since this is a largely human affair, it also requires a human solution. Hence, it is important that a deeper introspection is forged. Moreover, "the 'burden' and 'greatness' of being rooted in the belief of God calls upon us to engage 'the social and political life of others' by challenging any foundation built on hatred and violence" (Baumgardt 2012, p. 122).

The foundation for the Christian's solidarity with the suffering of the world lies in the specific dangerous memory of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. This memory carries the eschatological promise of God that death will not triumph in human history. According to Metz, the memory of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection implies that the meaning of the victims of history has not been decided by the victors (Vento 2002, p. 9). Metz's refusal to find meaning in radical suffering, to excuse it, or to trivialize it with explanation is essential in working against tendencies in Christian theology to encourage victims passively to accept or to spiritualize their suffering. He refuses to reduce human suffering to a theory or to try to fit it comfortably into a concept of God. His understanding of 'suffering unto God', of the need to continue to cry out to God in the language of prayer about the suffering of the vulnerable, respects the negativity of the experience of suffering and refuses to let it be ignored (Vento 2002, p. 11).

The suffering that causes us to cry out or finally to be pitifully silent is never something lofty; it is nothing great or exalted. In its roots, it is completely different from a strong, compassionate solidarity. It is not even a sign of love but far more frighteningly a symptom of not being able to love any more (Metz 1992, p. 286). As Metz underlines, the memory of suffering as a category of political theology is primarily the memory of neighbors' suffering rather than mine. However, there is always a distorted form of dangerous memory, which identifies the memory of suffering with my tragic experience. When we remember the history of suffering, therefore, an appeal to universal freedom, justice, and rights for all human beings is needed to prevent my suffering from turning into a political weapon to

attack others (Kim 2013, p. 323). In the face of concrete histories of suffering, theology must be theodicy. But Metz does not mean by this what is commonly associated with theodicy: that is, the justification of God's goodness in the face of suffering or evil. For Metz, theodicy is the lived question addressed to God about the suffering of the world, not a tidy answer to it. The question itself is based on faith in God and God's promises for the salvation of all (Vento 2002, p. 8) even in the midst of human failures.

7. Violence as Failure of Relationships

Basically, violence is the coercive attempt to limit or thwart the exercise and realization of the essential and effective freedom of a human person or a social group. It aims to obliterate the fundamental liberty or active, dynamic, determination of self by the human person. Violence seeks to destroy not only the body but the spirit as well; hence, it breeds despair, hopelessness, and rage (Copeland 2012, p. 78). Today, everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape (Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 53). In a contested and divided space like Taraba, where all of the sentiments expressed are true and things are heated up with raids and attacks from Fulani herdsmen without security and protection, life is a lot messier than can be imagined. Those close to government insist: "Taraba State Government has put in relentless efforts to achieve the level of peace being enjoyed in the State before the ugly resurgence of herdsmen invading Communities and taking lives, destroying property and depriving people from going about their normal daily activities as witnessed in these few days" (Taraba State Government 2017). Underneath this effort is the repeated occurrence of violence which suggests that it is not being dealt with, and harmonious relationships continue to suffer.

When perpetrators and victims suppress the past and consciously strive to forget it, they build a destructive identity. This destructive identity can cause the stronger person, group or nation, to oppress the weaker person, group or nation, in order to find or maintain their identity. It is therefore possible that people with a lack of a sense of self-worth and identity, based on their selective memory, can justify almost everything to regain their identity, even if it entails oppressing others with violence or violating the rights of others (Thesnaar 2011b, p. 535). Perpetrators use violence to obtain what they want. In return, victims of this violent behavior employ violence to retaliate, and in doing so, the violence takes on a cyclical character that soon spins out of control (Thesnaar 2011a, p. 27). This is constantly seen as renewed attacks as noticed from the Fulani herdsmen in Taraba. They have increased their attack on Christian and farming communities. The helplessness of the traditional institution and state government in handling these conflict situations and crises leaves room for more question than answers. Moreover, the apathy that exists among communities in Taraba is very toxic. With these kinds of frustration, violence is inevitable. Relationships are compromised; it is only by addressing the pains of victims and perpetrators that progress can be made.

Metz argues that memory is indeed what gives people, both as individuals and as communities, their historical identity: "Identity is formed when memories are aroused" (Metz 1981, p. 66). Metz goes even farther than Pope Francis (2013). Where Francis encourages us to weep in solidarity with the victims of history, Metz emboldens us to complain. Suffering unto God entails crying out and grumbling and culminates not in pious satisfaction but in more questions: a "passionate requestioning that arises out of suffering, a requestioning of God, full of highly charged expectation" (Reynolds 2015, p. 5). Suffering does not provide you with any room to express yourself. You are in a sense forced

to be silent, and as you become more silent, the more you tend to be isolated (Thesnaar 2011a, p. 32).

There are also, of course, ways in which grief can spiral inward into despair and outward into violence. Real grief must be voiced, the losses must be lamented, but we cannot stay only in grief. On the other hand, for all of the inspirational success stories from survivors at the official memorial, there is a danger of glossing over the real, deep, and continuing pain many continue to suffer (Welch 2014, p. 4). The intensity of the emotions they are experiencing as well as the difficulty to communicate it should never be underestimated (Thesnaar 2011a, p. 33). Metz identifies with the traumatic experience of war from his background as a 'dangerous memory' and strongly affirms that dangerous memories are memories in which earlier experiences flare up and unleash new dangerous insights for the present (Baumgardt 2012, p. 101). These resonate with the experiences of victims in Taraba who are constantly caught in this violent situation and have to bury their dead. Similarly, the experience in which they cannot return to their farm land and have become displaced in their communities continues to resurface, as Metz has noted new and surprising outcomes that perpetuate violence and blow up any trace of relationships.

Metz understands memory analogically as a capacity to remember various histories of the downtrodden and the dead. Memory also includes the specifically Christian memory of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These diverse ranges of memory are dialectically interrelated, variously exercising epistemological warrants as well as sociopolitical critiques (Simon 1999, p. 198). The memory of Jesus, by contrast, generates empathy toward the sufferings of others, and openness to their testimonies encourages the humiliated to tell their own stories, and it holds open the threatening possibility for freedom. These memories not only resonate together and reinforce each other; they alter the socio-personal imagination and mobilize political agency (Simon 1999, p. 198). Metz's rejections undoubtedly illuminate the way in which the cry of dereliction is not a declaration of atheism but a protest on behalf of suffering humanity with whom Christ is joined irrevocably in shared suffering and grief (Marsden 2010, p. 445). Metz writes, "in this sense post idealist theology speaks of universal or universalizable interest, based on the biblical tradition itself. This is 'hunger and thirst for justice' and indeed, justice for all, for the living and the dead, present and past sufferings" (Kim 2013, p. 320). Notably, until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities, the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode (Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 59). To control this explosion, Christians may learn to build loving relationships on the foundational theology of the Triune God.

8. Conclusions: Trinity and Relationship

Perhaps, Metz's theology is an attempt "at a first level of reflection" to demonstrate the truth and transformative power of Christian faith but now within the arena of historical catastrophes and political struggle rather than that of the individual's attempt to make sense of his or her own existence (Ashley 2004, p. 247). Metz writes "if we are concerned, then with the human situation, we have first to analyze this situation, since we cannot expect an analysis to be provided in advance either by theology or by any standardized philosophy" (Metz 1981, p. 3). As such, retrieval will pave the way for critically addressing the damage that emerges during ethnic and religious crisis, as seen in Taraba. The painful truth about the violence perpetuated in Taraba seeks remedies not in the unfortunate narrative that demonizes ethnic identities on the grounds of political affiliations or religious ties but more in the lack of a solid glue of relationships. Communities in Taraba are bonded together by family ties, extended relations and deep marriages unions. These affiliations

and ties transcend the borders of ethnicity and religion and are permanently glued together by love.

Such bounds of love are the ultimate recognition of God's creation, and it is manifested in interconnected relationships. This is clearly demonstrated in the Christian understanding of the trinity: a relationship of three persons in one God. Throughout Christian history, the idea that humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) has precipitated much thought and analysis. Theologians over the centuries have proposed numerous answers to the question of what exactly the image of God in human nature consists of. In the twentieth century, this question came back to the forefront as a part of the renewed interest among theologians in the nature of the Trinity. These reflections on the Trinity, and the implications for human relationships, shed light on the way we understand relationships (Baab 2006).

Selfishness, mistrust and domination damage relationships and can hinder friendship. On the other hand, love, trust and servant hood nurture relationships and encourage fellowship (Life Mission Fellowship 2006). "Love must be understood as an unconditional will to create just relationships and structures" (Henson 1999, p. 54). Clearly, what matters most is relationship, and the Bible's story and message must be seen through "relationship glasses". In the process, the Cappadocians made a provocative philosophical move by defining God as being primarily in terms of relationship (Zscheile 2007, p. 45). While asserting the common divine ousia (the 'what' of God), they placed equal emphasis on how God is God (as three persons in relationship). In the seventh century, John of Damascus applied the term perichoresis ('circulating around') to the Trinity as a way to describe the interdependent, dynamic, mutual indwelling of the three persons. This social understanding of the Trinity came to dominate the eastern theological tradition (Zscheile 2007, p. 45). The Trinity defines the Christian's personal and communal existence through its own consummate relationality even as it fundamentally reveals the character of God. It is in the divine perichoretic dance of participation that we find the source for the theonomous self, a self that is neither self-determined (autonomous) nor completely other-determined (heteronomous), but 'named with reference to its origin and destiny in God' (Medley 2003, p. 384). This divine source of relationship can be replicated in the challenge to combat the devastation of ethnic religious crisis in Taraba and create a path toward peace and development.

Since the Christian understanding of human personhood receives its shape and pattern from the triune God, the human vocation is to learn to see and act rightly by participating in the mystery of the triune life of God. Moreover, knowing the triune God and learning how to see and act rightly are inseparable from participating in the Christian community and its practices (Medley 2003, p. 383). "Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things. Therefore, man is split within himself. As a result, all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, man finds that by himself he is incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though he is bound by chains" (Paul VI Pope 1965, p. 13).

To unbound the chains of memory and open up for sharing and healing of memories, Metz proposes beginning with meal sharing: a meal is embedded in relationships, and memory is a significant part. Hence, Metz's adoption of 'dangerous memory' engages the Eucharist to interrogate Jesus' practice of table fellowship, which exemplifies his practice of befriending persons who were despised, marginalized, and forsaken. Even today, in the practice of the Eucharist, a similar structure is maintained: to gather as brothers and sisters in friendship and to extend the friendship of God by befriending the broken, violated, abused and dispossessed (Medley 2003, p. 394). "Thus, even though there is brokenness and alienation in the world, in societies, in families and relationships, and, yes, sadly, in

the Church, the Eucharist should prompt the Church to be an agent of reconciliation and healing not only among its members, but also for the world" (Wadell 2004, p. 294).

That is to say, the remembrance structure that Metz wants Christians to bring to contemporary society is a frame of mind wherein they consider the narratives and images of the lost and dead, of those presently silent and marginalized, to be essential to the decisions and actions taken in the economic, political, technological, and educational arenas. With the service of the Lord's Day functioning as the source and summit of their lives, they find not only the courage and strength but also the desire and aptitude for joining fellow citizens in the ethics of remembering, which opens up a space from which the work of justice can move forth (Morrill 2000, p. 22). In this example, there is the privileging of contemporary experience, the use of interdisciplinary methods to understand that experience, critical dialogue between theology and experience, the adoption of liberal or radical theological models that highlight and question contemporary injustice, and the need to make a difference to understanding and practice (Pattison and Gordon 2005, p. 413).

Narratives of death can appear sovereign, but Christians believe that these sagas of diminishment will not prevail because the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus make possible a new way of life in which the logic of violence is exposed and overcome. This life-giving narrative entered the world in Christ and should continue to be told by all those baptized in his name. In this story, people build one another up, support and care for one another, seek the best for each other, and offer forgiveness when they fail. In this story, people acknowledge the things that foster division and nurture breakdowns in love but commit to cultivating instead the demanding but truly hopeful disciplines of love, truthfulness, patience, and forgiveness (Wadell 2004, p. 289). Therefore, Metz argues that "a church that is maturing into a universal cultural polycentrism must treat and implement the biblical inheritance primarily as the basis of a hermeneutical culture" (Kim 2013, p. 329). Biblical understandings of others, the memory of suffering, and the radical claim of the Kingdom of God offer a wider background against which the deeper structure of universal principles for human rights, social justice and political emancipation of humanity can be known and practiced (Kim 2013, p. 329). Metz articulates not simply intellectual knowledge but its marriage with the unknowing that reveals wisdom: real strength and real freedom know that we are utterly reliant on God and unable to be satisfied by anything less than the divine (Pierce 2008, p. 11).

In the first part of this piece, it offered a more specific investigation within the parameters of Metz's critical contribution to theology: memory and relationships with elements of continuity as well as rupture. In the second section of the examination, the interest was to problematize this 'notion of dangerous memories'. As a result, two specific and contrasting concerns must be noted in passing: firstly, the persistence of the cry of the innocents and the pains of those caught in ethno-religious tension in Taraba State. Also, it is necessary to note the practical imperative of speaking effectively of relationships within and to a culture that maintains a morbid fascination with the theme of stability and peace as well as an understandably deep-seated resistance to it. The piece asks whether our understanding of violence can be reformulated so as to better satisfy these concerns. Since ethno-religious violence as seen remains a weakness of relationships, the specific proposal is that an articulation of the Trinitarian notion of relationships and the Eucharist as the home of filiations may actually do much of the work of reconciliation and healing of memories, which is required from the practice of relationship.

Dangerous memories and the ethnic religious experiences of those involved in the conflicts in Taraba State require a reset. The struggle is, how does the '*memoria passionis*' as provocatively thought by Metz as a concept from the Christian tradition translate into today's secularized culture? A major path that comes to mind is advancing not only the

wisdom that comes from the 'Book of the Divine' (biblical narratives) but a healthy dose of the 'Book of nature' (care of the earth). This, to my mind, is the key to unlocking the deep reasoning that Metz is attempting to teach here. The world is enriched the memories we create, which are defined by the relationships we strengthen and renewed by the narratives that drives our actions. I believe this is what Metz is attempting to do here as a recipe for a refreshing start to our secular world.

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Note

[1] Here is a list of the endless crises and outright wars that is been fought around the world and deserve mention: most of the ongoing situations in Ukraine and Russia, Israel, Palestine and Lebanon. These are just the most recent situations of explicit violence before the eyes of the world right now.

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