

Towards a Biblical Response to Self Defense in Luke 22:36

Olugbenga Olagunju PhD

ABSTRACT---*The pertinent question in the minds of Christians who finds themselves in violent ravaged region is “what is the Bible’s stance against violence? Can Christians fight back when illegally mistreated by fellow countrymen in the name of religion, or should believers in Christ continue to be onlookers when their family members are being killed and their properties destroyed? Aside from church leaders, and national leaders, those in the academic parlance are also divided on the matter of self-defense as a Christian response to violence by Islam fundamentalist and terrorist. Some scholars oppose the idea with vicious resistance while others believe we have a God-given right to self-defense against harm and have not only the responsibility of defending others from harm but are accountable to God for their defense and protection. This paper tends toward a biblical response to self-defense against violent attacks on Christianity and argues whether Christian should take up arms against the invaders and stop them from harming the church or exterminate Christianity or should not? Using historical-critical and exegetical approach in Luke 22:36 the writer thus, submits that Christian should be guided by the Holy Spirit before they act in Self Defense when they are faced with violent attack by the enemy of their faith. The writer also employs this tool to unravel the mystery behind the text and conclude with the position a Christian should take when faced with terror attack or violence by the enemy of the cross.*

Key words: *Towards, Biblical, Response, Self Defense, Luke*

Introduction

The world is currently witnessing an unprecedented increase in the level of violence against Church, Christianity, and Christians. It is no doubt a serious matter of concern in Nigeria as the violence has evolved from the use of machetes and clubs, to the use of automatic guns AK47, Grenade, small arms, and bombs. Church leaders in Nigeria are harshly disunited over how to react to this surge in violent attacks against Christians and churches in the country especially in the entire Northern region where Muslims are in the majority are in a dilemma not knowing what to do or how to respond to the attack from these extremists who are unleashing terror on them every day? Sometimes ago, hundreds of Christians were killed, and churches burnt in a coordinated attack by the Muslim extremists and Fulani herdsmen in Jos, Adamawa, Gombe and other states in the Middle Belt and the North East and Central region. The Boko Haram terrorists and Bandit in Southern Kaduna, Katsina and Sokoto are making insecurity in the country a challenge to the security agencies like the military, paramilitary, and police. Recently in Niger States some bandits unleashed terror on innocent citizens and the security personnel killing scores of them. These continuous attacks have exterminated churches in the terror ravages community especially in states aforementioned above. Hardly can one find any church standing in this particular area because most of the churches are either burnt or destroyed. This incidence has thrown the Christian community into thinking of what to do. Should they also take up arms and fight or just be watching and allow the enemy of their faith to annihilate them from their father's land or do nothing or folds their arms for heaven sake? While some continue to advocate for eye for an eye, others are telling Christians to turn the other cheek and be calm and pray. But now the paradigm has shifted from turning the other cheek to urging Christians to defend themselves if not, the church will be annihilated and allow history to repeat itself of what happened during the medieval period when all the churches in North Africa were overran by the Muslims vandals.

In 2011 CAN national president Ayo Oristejafor stated that Christians can no longer continue to watch while aggressors attack them. “I have a responsibility to defend myself and my family,” he said. “Christians in the nation have suffered enough.” John Praise, general overseer of Dominion Chapel International Churches in Abuja, has called for churches to raise “young people to defend the church because nobody has the monopoly of violence”. In contrast, bishop Wale Oke, national vice president of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria’s South West region, argues that Christians must resist such temptation to fight for themselves, “we must depend on God to fight our battles” he said for our weapon of war is not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds casting all imagination and making people to come to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:3-5 NIV)

What is Self- Defense?

Self-defense is a counter-measure that involves defending oneself, one’s property, or the well-being of another from harm.⁶⁶⁷ The use of the right of self-defense as a legal justification for the use of force in times of danger is available in many jurisdictions, but the interpretation varies widely. Physical self-defense is the use of physical force to counter an immediate threat of violence. Such force can be either armed or unarmed. In either case, the chances of success depend on a large number of parameters, related to the severity of the threat on one hand, but also on the mental and physical preparedness of the defender.

The self-defense laws of modern legislation have their foundation on the Roman law principle of dominion where any attack on the members of the family or the property it owned was a personal attack on the ‘pater familias’ In Leviathan (1651), Hobbes argues that although some may be stronger or more intelligent than others in their natural state, none are so strong as to be beyond a fear of violent

⁶⁶⁷ www.dictionary.reference.com

death, which justifies self-defense as the highest necessity (Frier & Macdean, 135).

Business Dictionary.com defines “self-defense as the use of reasonable force (as compared with the attacker’s force) in protection of one’s person, family, property, or anyone else against attempted or threatened attack. Legal doctrine of self-defense justifies as preemptive action taken in the reasonable belief of immediate danger, without making any retreat, and may (specially in case of provocation) condone killing of the perpetrator of a murderous attack”.⁶⁶⁸

Exegesis of Luke 22:36 in respect to Self-Defense

εἶπεν δὲ αὐτοῖς· ἀλλὰ νῦν ὁ ἔχων βαλλάντιον ἀράτω, ὁμοίως καὶ πήραν, καὶ ὁ μὴ ἔχων πωλησάτω τὸ ἱμάτιον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀγορασάτω μάχαιραν.

And he said unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet; and he that hath none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword. ASV

He said to them, "But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. RSV

Jesus Christ is well known for His continued emphasis on love, forgiveness, and “turning the other cheek.” It is therefore surprising to find Jesus advising the disciples to buy a sword in Luke 22:36. “But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one”. Did Jesus in this verse advocate the use of a sword for self-defense purposes? One could draw a literal mandate of two swords for every 12 believers, although that does not seem to be Jesus’ meaning (Regardless of one’s interpretation, though, Christ clearly desired that the disciples be

⁶⁶⁸ www.businessdictionary.com

armed for defense and not for offensive purposes or aggression and as the passage suggest, if necessary, for self-defense Brandon, 35). Having a couple of swords around was one of the most effective ways to deter criminal activity. Literalists might insist that the scripture only authorized the possession of swords. Kapel however maintains that the Biblical precepts relating to swords apply equally to any other weapons that can be used for personal defense such as rocks, knives, sticks, hatchets, baseball bats, firearms, etc. Even an automobile can be used as a defensive weapon. The question therefore is not, “What is a sword?” but rather, “Are you reasonably prepared to defend yourself and those around you from physical attack, and is your trust in the spirit of God rather than in your own planning and power? Kapel retorted, (Kapel 43).

In Luke 22:35-39 Jesus said to them. “When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?” so they said, “Nothing.” 36 then He said to them, “But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. 37 “For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: ‘and He was numbered with the transgressors.’ For the things concerning Me have an end.” 38 so they said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” And He said to them, “It is enough.” 39 Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him.⁶⁶⁹

Here’s the context let us picture this event Jesus and his disciples have just had communion. They are about to go for a time of prayer in the garden. Jesus said these words to His disciples, and it was as if they were saying, “Look what we have with us, Lord. Two Swords” Jesus responded, “it is enough.” There are questions about the applicability of this passage, of the intent of Jesus, of the meaning of His response. Whatever the interpretation of this passage may mean,

⁶⁶⁹ (Arlandson, <http://www.answering-islam.org>)

there are a few broad-stroke observations we can make about this passage according to Arlandson.

1. Jesus expected them to have swords and anticipated a time when those without swords would need to acquire them
2. Among eleven disciples, they did have two swords – in almost a 1:5 ratio.
3. Jesus expected them to carry the swords on their person as they traveled from the city to the garden prayer meeting.

It is difficult to make absolute claims beyond these observations, but the observations themselves have significance. Namely, among those closed to Jesus, some carried personal weapons in His presence with His consent to communion and to prayer meeting (Gillman, 142). We cannot make absolute claims as to the reason, right or, wrong, for the carriage of these weapons. Perhaps it was in anticipation of trouble from the Jewish leadership. Perhaps it was protection against mere robbers. Paul in 2 Cor. 11:26 Cites the “perils of robbers”. Though there are questions we can’t answer, we do know they possessed these weapons, and that they carried these weapons, and that Jesus knew and consented (Frederic L, 84). Furthermore, Jesus spoke of some time, present or further, when disciples would need to acquire personal weapons, even more urgently than garments.

According to James M. Arlandson, the textual context of Luke 22:36 reveal at least two truths. First, Jesus contrasts his ministry before his arrival in Jerusalem with the tense few days in Jerusalem when spies and the authorities themselves were seeking to trap him⁶⁷⁰. Does the tension play a part in understanding why he told his disciples to go out and buy swords? The second is that, Christ states that he would be arrested and be tried as a criminal, as the prophecy in Is. 53:12 predicted. Does this have anything to do with sword? Do criminals carry them around? Arlandson believes Jesus may have a

⁶⁷⁰ (Arlandson, <http://www.answering-islam.org>.)

deeper meaning in mind than the violent use of the swords⁶⁷¹. Matthew Henry in his commentary also stated that Christ in this passage only gave notice of a very great change of circumstance now approaching the disciples. The disciples must not expect that their friends would be kind to them as they had been (Henry,). Therefore, they required going along with a purse, because they may need it. They must now expect that their enemies would be fiercer than they had been, and they would need weapons. At the time the apostles understood Christ to mean real weapons, but Matthew Henry claims Christ spoke only of the weapons of the spiritual warfare. The sword of the Spirit is the sword with which the Disciples of Christ must furnish themselves.

Jacques Ellul and John Howard Yoder do not believe Luke 22:36 overturns the many times Jesus urged his followers to practice turning the other cheek and not resist evil when confronted by violence during his sermon on the mount and years of ministry (Jacques, 64). They stated that when the passage is taken in context (Luke 22:36-38), Jesus is also aware of fulfilling prophecy and makes a surprising statement that two swords are “enough”. More commonly, the phrase is understood to mean Jesus has had enough of the topic. Ellul, Yoder and Archie Penner claim that two swords could not possibly have been “enough” to defend Jesus from his pending arrest, trial and execution, so their sole purpose must have been Jesus’ wish to fulfill a prophecy (Isaiah 53:9-12) (Jacques, 64).

Guthrie, Motyer, Stibbs, Wiseman substantiate the above claim stating that the words of Christ are not to be understood literally, that he would have his disciples furnish themselves with swords at any rate, since he would never have said, as he afterwards does, that two were sufficient; which could not be enough for eleven men; or would have forbidden Peter the use of one, as he did in a very little time after this: but his meaning is, that wherever they came, and a door was opened for the preaching of the Gospel (Guthrie, 98), they would have

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

many adversaries, and these powerful, and would be used with great violence, and be followed with rage and persecution; so that they might seem to stand in need of swords to defend themselves: the phrase is expressive of the danger they would be exposed to (Guthrie, Motyer and Stibbs, 942), and of their need of protection; and therefore it was wrong in them to be disputing and quarrelling about superiority, or looking out for, and expecting temporal pomp and grandeur, when this would be their forlorn, destitute, and afflicted condition; and they would quickly see the affliction and distress begin in himself.

Caird suggests that the word μάχαιραν. meaning a sword was inserted here from what is said in Luke 22:38, as it is evident our Lord never intended to make any resistance, or to suffer a sword to be used on the occasion; see Matthew 26:52. The word stands rather oddly in the passage: the verse, translated in the order in which it stands, is as follows: And he who hath none, let him sell his garment and buy – a sword (Caird, 17). Now it is plain that the verb ἀγορασάτω, is an imperative aorist active 3rd person singular from the word ἀγοράζω meaning let him buy, this word from the Greek text is a command or instruction that is hortatory in nature “let him” which may be referred to the purchase of a scrip, in the former part of the verse: therefore if, according to the bishop’s opinion, the word sword be omitted, the passage may be understood thus:

“When I sent you out before, Luke 10:1, etc., I intended you to continue itinerant only for a few days, and to preach the gospel only to your country-men; therefore you had but little need of a staff, purse, or scrip, as your journey was neither long, nor expensive; but now I am about to send you into all the world, to preach the gospel to every creature; and as ye shall be generally hated and persecuted for my sake, ye shall have need to make every prudent provision for your journey; and so necessary will it be for you to provide yourselves victuals, etc., for your passage through your inhospitable country, that, if any of you have no scrip or wallet, he should, think that it was

a proverbial expression, intimating a time of great difficulty and danger, and that now the disciples had need to look to themselves, for his murderers were at hand (Caird, 27).

It is worthy to note that these words were spoken to the disciples just before Christ went to the garden of Gethsemane, and that the danger was now so very near that there could be no time for any of them to go and sell his garment in order to purchase a sword to defend himself or to defend his Master from the attack of the Jewish mob.

James McGahey (a professor of New Testament Theology at the Dallas Theological Seminary) states that at that time early in his ministry the disciples were sent out to the towns of Galilee with the express instruction not to take moneybags, knapsacks, and sandals, depending instead, on the gracious hospitality of the people to whom they were sent. Now, however, the situation was about to change drastically for the worse. Not only were they to take such necessary preparations as a moneybag and knapsack. The coming situation would be so dire that, if they lacked even these necessities, they should sell their essential outer cloak (ἱματίον) and buy a sword (μάχαιραν).⁶⁷²

The question however is how these above theories can be substantiated through the scripture, since Christ Himself never gave any other meaning to his statement nor did he explain to his disciples that it was in fulfillment of scriptures. Besides the observations briefly mentioned above any attempt to interpret this unique passage requires one address other issues as well. These topics include, but are limited to, the following: the location of the periscope within the Luke's Gospel at the conclusion of the Last Supper; the testamentary role of the periscope within its near-context (i.e., Luke 22:14-38) the overall theology of the Gospel of Luke; the conspicuous absence of this passage from all other gospels, both canonical and extracanonical; possible sources and the authenticity of the sword-logion; the

⁶⁷² McGahey, <http://jamesmccahey.blogspot.com>

meaning of *αλλα νυν* (but now), *δει* (it is necessary) and *ικανον εστιν* (“it is enough”); the purpose of the quote from Isa 53:12; the identity of *οι ανομοι* (“the lawless one”); and the presence of significant textual variants, if any. Scholars like Conzelmann’s theological approach set the passage within Luke’s overall Kerygmatic presentation of the grand periods of salvation history (Gilbrant, Thoralf, Inge, 337). Moore stated that Minear’s literary analysis focused on the more immediate context (i.e., Jesus’ supper dialogue and his arrest in the garden) in order to explain the Isa 53 citation and identify “the lawless ones” (Moore, 6). He further states that both Lampe and Gormley used source and redaction criticism as a way to investigate Luke’s editorial acumen, especially as it relates to his incorporation and adaptation of Isa 53:12 along with verses from Mark 14. In order to establish a plausible historical backdrop that might clarify Luke 22:35-38, Heiligenthal, Bartsch, and Voobus employed form criticism (Moore, 25). Despite utilizing the same critical method, the fact that each scholar reached a different conclusion as to the specific historical setting further illustrates the complex nature of this pericope. Brandon and Price examined the sword-logion on the basis of an ideological assumption that encourages nor permits, at the very least, the use of force by Christians. Finally, Kruger investigated the *pericope* in light of two OT traditions (i.e., the Divine Warrior and the Suffering Servant) and projects Jesus as a tortured personal who was caught at least momentarily between these two competing identities (Moore, 56).

The elusive meaning of the “two-sword” passage is clearly seen in various scholarly approaches to the Gospel of Luke. Prior research has commonly employed traditional historical-critical methods in order to propose theories about the meaning of Luke 22:35-38. For example, these methods have included: theological criticism by Hans Conzelmann; literary criticism by Paul S. Minear; source and redaction criticism by G.W.H. Lampe and Joan Frances Gormely; form criticism by Roman Heiligenthal, Hans-Werner Bartsch, and Arthur Voobus; used ideological readings (Moore, 10).

According to Conzelmann's theological approach the passage is written within Luke's overall Kerygmatic presentation of the grand periods of salvation history. Minear's literary analysis focused on the more immediate context (i.e., Jesus' supper dialogue and his arrest in the garden) in order to explain the Isa 53 citation and identify "the lawless ones." Both Lampe and Gormley used source and redaction criticism as a way to investigate Luke's editorial acumen, especially as it relates to his incorporation and adaptation of Isa 53:12 along with verses from Mark 14. In order to establish a plausible historical backdrop that might clarify Luke 22:35-38, heiligenthal, Bartsch, and Voobus employed form criticism. Despite utilizing the same critical method, the fact that each scholar reached a different conclusion as to the specific historical setting further illustrates the complex nature of this periscope. Brandon and Price examined the sword-logion on the basis of an ideological assumption that encourages or permits, at the very least, the use of force by Christians.

Towards the Theology of Self-Defense in Luke 22:36 to the Church in Africa

The Christian church in Africa is undergoing a period of serious attacks by several militant groups with particular reference to Islamic fundamentalism. The Islamic brotherhood for example has over the years and especially now is being the bane of Christianity in Egypt. Islamic militants in Northern Sudan have made several attempts on the lives of Christians in their country and neighboring South Sudan, in Northern Nigeria most recently the booming of churches and the massacre of Christians old and young is gradually becoming rampant and unsettling. The big question is what should Christians do in wake of these unprovoked attacks?

According to the conclusion of Brandon and Price which is the position of the writer of this paper, believers should do the following in the light of Luke 22:36:

- a. Have weapons that have the capacity needed to defend themselves, their families and others that needed help. As the disciples were asked to sell their clothing and buy swords
- b. The church in Africa should not be involved in reprisal attacks, and the killing of the innocent as that will be contrary to the principles in the passage, and also contrary to the general idea presented by the New Testament.
- c. Based on the historical setting of the passage, the disciples could protect themselves against criminals and wild animals on the dry and dusty roads of the Ancient near east. The parable of the Good Samaritan gives us a vivid example of how dangerous the roads could be in those days. The disciples were therefore encouraged to carry arms in order to protect themselves. Knowing the dangerous nature of some areas in Africa, believers in those environments should carry arms in other to protect themselves and their families.
- d. It is not wrong for believers to have weapons to defend themselves; it does not indicate lack of faith in God's ability to protect or spiritual immaturity as many have been brainwashed to believe it. Christ was present while Peter carried a sword, and when Peter used it erroneously, he never asked Peter to throw the sword away, and when Peter used the sword to cut the ear of one of the servants of the priest Jesus only caution him and heal the servant. All believers should go and have weapons of defense in case of any eventual outbreak of violence against them they will have weapon to defend themselves and the family. Contemporary African believers should learn from the reality of the past when the Muslim vandals came the church during the medieval period, it takes the effort of some Christians to defend their territory from being invaded by the Muslim invaders and till today those territory is still Christian territory. If not for the effort and understanding of

the leaders t that time those places would have been Islamized. Today in Nigeria communities in the North Eastern part that are Christians have been over ran by the book haram insurgent and most of the Christians were displaced and occupied by the Islamist while the government insist that no citizen should carry a weapon, but this religious bigot has the audacity and effrontery to carry gun without being challenged by the authority to destroy their fellow country.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted an interpretation of Luke 22:36 using historical-critical and exegetical method in reference to developing a theology of Self-defense, drawing out implications for the church in Africa. Evidently, based on the geographical location, and the historical background of the text the disciples were encouraged to carry weapons to defend themselves against robbers and other aggressors, it is also evidently clear that Christ was aware that some of his disciples carried swords around, and he indeed encouraged them to buy swords. Above and beyond the positive or negative interpretations put forward in this paper, it is note worthy that Luke 22:36 is enigmatic passage, but the intentions of Christ are always noble and self defense is a biblical, theological phenomenon that should be encouraged for the preservation of life.

Sources

Brandon, Samuel George Frederick. *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967

Christoyannopoulos, Alexandre. *Christian Anarchism: Apolitical Commentary on the Gospel*, Exeter: Imprint Academic 2010.

D.Guthrie, J.A. Motyer, A.M. Stibbs, D.J Wiseman. *The New Bible Commentary: Revised Third Edition* Guideposts, Carmel New York, 1990

Dictionary.com's Definition of Self-Defense. Dictionary.reference.com.

- Frier & McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Family Law*, Oxford University Press 2004.
- G.H.W. Lampe. The Two swords (Luke 22:35-38); in *Jesus and politics of his day* (eds. Ernst Bammel and C .F.D. Moule; Cambridge; Cambridge university press, 1984.
- G. B. Caird. *The Gospel of St. Luke Pelican Gospel Commentaries*; New York: Seabury, 1968.
- Garrett, Susan R. *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1967.
- Gilbrant, Thoralf, and Tor Inge Gilbrant. *The Complete Biblical Library. Study Bible, Vol. 4, Rev. Ed. Edited by Ralph W. Harris. Springfield: The Complete Biblical Library, 1986.reprint, 1991.*
- Godet, Frederic L. *A Commentary on the Gospel of St Luke* 2 vols. Translated by E W Shalders. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1875. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981.
- Gormley, Joan Francis. "The Final Passion Prediction: A study of Luke 22:35-38." Ph. D. diss., Fordham University, 1974.
- James M. Arlandson. *A Brief Explanation of the Sword in Luke 22:36.* [http://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/Arlandson/luke 22:36.htm](http://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/Arlandson/luke%2022:36.htm).
- James McGahey *Jesus and the Two Swords: A Biblical Justification for Bearing Arms?* <http://jamesnogahey.blogspot.com/2013/03jesus-and-two-swords-justification-for.html>.
- Kopel, David B.; Gallant, Paul and Eisen, Joanne D. *The Human Right of Self-Defense.* *BYU Journal of public Law* (BYU Law School) 2008.
- Robert Jamieson, A.R. Faussett and David Brown *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental and Pratical on the Old and New Testament Volume 3, Part One.* William B. Erdsmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1976.