

# **Calvinistic Doctrine of Common Grace as Portrayed in Matthew 5:45 and Luke 6:35: A Reaction to Irrepressible Bloodbaths in Nigerian Society**

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## **Abstract**

Common grace is a Reformed Calvinistic doctrine, referring to the grace of God that is common to all humankind as portrayed in Matthean and Lukan periscopes. The study employs semiotic analysis to assess common grace in the framework of restraint of evil with the aim to unearth the enigma of irrepressible bloodbaths aggravated by Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria. Common grace underscores God's restraint of evil, however, incessant bloodbaths flow in Nigeria uncontrollably and it puzzled the author to stomach this kind of monstrous act unabated. Where is the efficacy of restraint as Muslim terrorists shed blood every day? The study deduced from the premise of the argument that bloodbaths lurk harder nevertheless God's restraint takes pre-eminence.

**Key Words:** Calvinism, Common grace, Restraint, Muslim-terrorists and Bloodbaths.

## **Introduction**

The specifics of the Reformed doctrine of common grace have been somewhat contentious and from time to time inordinately challenged by some Calvinists. Exclusively in the Dutch tradition, it has been the cause of dissensions. It is apparent that there are heated debates in this locus of theology. These days however, there exists a conspicuous controversy that

forms the subject for fresh argument. The pace in discussion over common grace has been set on the question which has often perplexed thinkers in the theological circles. The first part of common grace is perceived in God's merciful restriction on the evil that fallen people may do. The restraint of sin's destructiveness is the core of common grace with a basis of God's mercy. God restrains sin by His providence in such a way that a sinner is restricted in the expression of sin by the circumstances of life in which God's providence places him. But why is it that Boko Haram-Fulani headers' story seems to be quite bizarre? It is a stumbling block that heightens the author's curiosity in delving into this study. Why would a supposedly loving God allow bad things to happen to the innocent people? Boko Haram and Fulani terrorists seem to have been licensed to kill uncontrollably without restraint. Where is the efficacy of common grace? This study is delimited to the concept of Calvinistic doctrine of common grace that restrains evil and its significance to Nigerian experience of uncontrollable massacres. The study is set out to explore this conundrum. Thus, the passages in Matthew 5. 45 and Luke 6. 35 which address common grace are examined to shed light on the prevailing argument.

### **Calvinistic Doctrine of Common Grace in the Reformed Theology**

Calvin (1960) in his Institutes, with vigor always articulates that God displays fatherly mercy to folks in general, that he loves the human race and is concerned for its wellbeing. Thus, all folks must cogitate it a matter of grace that God has made them men and not animals (Inst. III: 22.1). This life is a testament of grace (Gen. 38: 7), the longer anyone lives in the world and daily experiences of God's fatherly care; it is assured that God has more generously shown him mercy. Thus, what sustains life is a gift of grace, and Calvin cites Mt. 5: 44, 45 in recurrent returns to this theme. Love your enemies . . . so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and

the unjust. Unquestionably Calvin (1960) identifies a general revelation of God in His works, and that this is a symbol of goodness. As a result, under Acts 17: 26, he says that God comes to run into us and makes himself noticeable by such apparent signs that we can have no justification for our ignorance. He ascertains an internal restraint of sin in Common Grace (Inst. II: 3.3 mentioned in Ps. 14: 3 and Rom. 3: 12). In the midst of this corruption of nature there is some place for God's grace: not for instance to purify but to restrain it interiorly. For if the Lord gave slack rein to the mind of each man to run uprising in his lusts, there would probably be no one who would not display in himself every evil thing for which Paul denounces all nature.

The font of Common Grace for Calvin is to a certain extent basically the fact that God is the source of all good. He does good for the reason that He is good. Nonetheless Christ is definitely correlated to the good which all folks take delivery of (Inst. I: 2.1). Accordingly, Calvin (1960) contends that humans do not, as philosophers suppose, have natural power over virtue and vice. Indubitably, this disputation occurs within Calvin's extended refutation of the freedom of the will, found in his Institutes II.2.1-11. Then, though Calvin uses words such as spark, seed, and remnant to refer to the lingering image of God surviving in fallen humanity, there are points at which he undeniably appears to reject any goodness, moral judgment, or reflection of the *imago* in fallen humanity. How then, does Calvin account for apparent goodness in the unregenerate, and to whom or what is this goodness attributed? Here is where Calvin grows his notion of the general grace of God, it is what later, Reformed theologians would call common grace as he upholds the good things that are perceived in the unregenerate as gifts of the Spirit of God. Common grace refers to what Calvin (1960) calls the general grace of God, special grace, or heavenly grace. What is outstanding, nevertheless, is that Calvin himself does not develop a full-grown doctrine of common grace, in so doing, its full delivery as a doctrine emerged in 19th century

through great thinkers like Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854–1921).

An external restraint of sin operates correspondingly. Calvin's renowned elucidations of the power of magistrates (Inst. IV: 20) designate their worth. Civil administration empowers men to breath, eat, drink and be warmed, but also in implementing law, curbs the impudence and debauchery of the evil folks and offers for general harmony and security. In discourse of the accurate use of legal proceedings Calvin asserts that the backing of the magistrate is a blessed gift of God. Calvin (1960) expresses his obligation to the idea of a work of God that restrains the unregenerate, averring that whatsoever men may mask their impurity, some are restrained only by disgrace, others by fright of the laws, from flouting out into several breeds of mischief. Some seek for a truthful life, as deeming it most favorable to their curiosity, while others are elevated above the loutish slice, that, by the self-respect of their position, they may retain inferiors to their duty. Hence, God by his providence, curbs the aberrance of nature, averting it from flouting out into action, however without translating it interiorly untainted (Institute II, iii, 3). Through the operation of common grace sin is restrained in the lives of folks and in society. This restraint may be external or internal or both, but does not transform the heart.

### **Common Grace Operates through Restraint of Evil and Install Protection**

God, with many variances of degree, restrains the curse of nature and the sin of the human heart. Calvin's (1960) perception of God's gracious work in the world and in the unregenerate, it appears, must be seen in relation to his doctrine of total corruption and depravity. For Calvin sin and evil are a vigorously prolific force, ever outpouring within and pouring out of the mind, will and heart of human beings. Considering this firm view of depravity, Calvin (1960) conceives of common grace as a form of divinely gracious restraint of sin.

God partly stems the flow of that active force, in that way creating a positive space for human goodness to thrive. Calvin exclusively underscores that within this man's corruption of nature there is some place for God's grace; not such grace as to purify it, but to restrain it inwardly.... In his elect the Lord therapies these diseases. Others he simply restrains by throwing a bridle over them only that they may not break loose, inasmuch as he foreknows their rheostat to be expedient to preserve all that is (Institutes II.3.3 cf. Ps. 14: 3 and Rom. 3: 12). The study perceives Calvin's (1960) determination to make sense of the unregenerate goodness and virtue without letting go of his vigorous account of total depravity. By so doing, the way that he reconciles a human nature is by attributing some purity in man's nature to God's compensatory and gracious restraining of sin on one hand, and complementary preservation of the created order on the other. It is attested that common grace is predisposed to sustaining some measure of moral order in a fallen world, as the other level of restricting the ferocity of sin. Not only does God constrain evil in society, but he also conserves some degree of the good. With the fall, Augustine avers that our will is a slave, and our free will having been made captive is unable to do anything with regard to righteousness. Yet with the Spirit's backing, humans may be compliant, and maintain morals in society (Calvin, 1960).

Herman Bavinck (2013) reveals the efficacy of restraint, that if God had not spared man, his fall would have involved the unabridged nature in devastation. As it was, God immediately after the fall interposed, in order by His common grace to curb sin, there is no part of the world in which some spark of the divine glory does not shine. The first part of common grace is seen in God's merciful constraint on the evil that fallen people may do. Restraint by an inward operation of the Holy Spirit ardently involves grace. A gracious restraint of sin in the unregenerate results in good works in the lives of the unregenerate. As Kuyper (1931) advocates that the restraint of sin's harmfulness is the crux of common grace with a basis of

God's mercy, this grace is neither an eternal grace nor a saving grace, but a time-based grace for the restraint of deterioration that prowls within sin. More so, Kuyper (1931) asserts that evil in this world is constrained by virtue of our preserving some aspects of being created in the image of God. He labels one core of God's image being true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness which mankind has lost to a large extent owing to the fall yet common grace improves this forfeiture. Til (2001) ascertains accordingly, by queuing up in the same line of thought that due to common grace, God graciously restrains the effects of sin in the life of the individual and society as a whole. This does not entail that God has condensed sin to a minimum, but moderately he thwarts the extreme sinfulness of which the human heart is capable. Murray (1977) in his puzzled mindset questioned, "How is it that men who still lie under the wrath and curse of God and are heirs of hell enjoy so many good gifts at the hand of God? How is it that men who are not savingly renewed by the Spirit of God nevertheless exhibit so many qualities, gifts and accomplishments that promote the preservation, temporal happiness, cultural progress, social and economic improvement of themselves and others. How is it that this sin cursed world enjoys so much favour and kindness at the hand of its holy and ever-blessed Maker? (93). Generally, Hoeksema and others, including Danhof, have briskly repudiated the reality of any form of common grace. They contend that it is unthinkable that God should be in any wisdom, at any point, amiably disposed to those who are not His elect. Though they both admit that the non-elect benefit from rain and sunshine, they do not cogitate these to be forms of God's grace or favor towards them (244). Hoeksema with constricted mind to dispute common grace inquired, how God could hate the wicked (Psa. 5) and yet show them grace. How can one not weaken total depravity and heighten good in sinners when Romans 3:10-23 impart that all fall short of the glory of God, and that no one can do any good? How can one uphold common grace and not end up causing the holy church of Jesus to turn out to be worldly to some extent? It appears

that common grace is conflicting to one unified decree of God to save the elect and damn the non-elect. All the people have been given the gift of conscience, with their consciences bearing witness to their actions (Rom. 2:14–15). Our conscience, which speaks with an authority that we know introspectively to be outside our natural corporeal desires, is thus a restraint on the evil we would if not do (Lewis 1952). Hodge (1982) contends that as God is everywhere modifying the activities of the world through the laws of nature, so he is also everywhere present in the minds of people. In this view, even unbelievers have the Holy Spirit persuading them to do good and to evade evil. Murray (1976) opines that a component of common grace is civil government which restrains sin and encourages good.

Flipping on the same page, the Reformed scholar Berkhof (1996) portrays that common grace curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees, gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers untold blessings upon the children of men. Like Berkhof, Geisler (2011) articulates that, the effects of sin on fallen human beings are so prodigious that without God's common grace society would be dilapidated and salvation unapproachable. In addition, he argues that without common grace: the judicial effects of sin (Rom 5.12-21) would produce irresistible guilt, the unsolved effects of sin (2 Cor 4.4) would make it intolerable for us to spot evil as such, the illusory effects of sin (Jer 17.19) would make coherent thought and action virtually impossible, the corrupting effects of sin (Rom 1.21-32) would be disparaging of self and others, the corruption effects of sin (Eph 2.1-3) would yield moral decline that would govern society, the distressing effects of sin (Rom 3.10-18) would make the performance of social good unachievable. It's God's common grace to unregenerate persons that makes living in this corrupt world thinkable. This common grace is given through His natural revelation (Rom 1.19-20), through His image (Gen 9.6; James

3.9), through marriage (Heb 13.4), through the family structure (Eph 6.1-4), through human government (Rom 13.1-7) and through other redemptive means. This attests that amid this corruption of nature the grace of God takes ascendancy.

The early church fathers, during the times of persecution under the Roman Empire, taught that regardless of the persecution, the Empire was still fundamentally good, essentially a quintessence of God's good providence, because its framework of law, order, and civilisation still acted as a check on sin, thus preventing, holding back the coming of Antichrist, the Man of Sin. This was how they interpreted the apostle Paul's puzzling declaration in 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8: the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed (Needham, 2017). The restrainer here was understood by the fathers to be the Roman Empire as the source of law, justice, and basic moral values. These she continued to hold and isometrics in the face of her persecution of the church, and therefore kept lawlessness and the appearance of the Lawless One in check. Hence the fathers of the church were able to uphold a positive attitude to the state as the community of common grace, even throughout times of persecution, and to pray for the preservation and comfort of the Roman Empire (Needham, 17). The Roman Empire has obviously long terminated, but the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2 is a general reference to law, justice, and civilisation, irrespective of the Roman Empire. As long as these things occur, the state continues to check and restrain sin, and hence to restrain the final eschatological appearance of sin. When however, these potentials are defeated within societies by increasing mischief, when human law stops to echo God's law, when government turns out to be an instrument for injustice, and when the values that make civilisation actually civilised are smashed, then the restraints are gone, and the Man of Sin will be able to step forth (Needham, 2017). A truly functioning state is an immeasurable blessing; even an erroneously functioning state, through its residue of justice, is still a blessing, and better



than anarchy, better than the lawlessness which is the antecedent of the Lawless One (Needham, 2017).

### **Common Grace Operates Beyond Restraint**

Common grace empowers humanity generally to accomplish specifically, that which is right in civil or natural affairs, in dissimilarity from that which is right in religious affairs, natural good works exclusively in social relations, works that are externally and accurately in synchronization with the law of God, though utterly destitute of any spiritual quality. This is in congruence with the Reformed Confession. Art. XIV of the Belgic Confession expresses in its heading of man's incapability to do what is really good, articulates that man reserved only small relics of his outstanding gifts, so as to invalidate his excuse, and discards only the Pelagian blunder that man can of himself do spiritual or saving good. The Canons of Dort III-IV, Art. 3, expresses in a parallel disposition confirms that therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, unable to attain saving good. Irrefutably, for Calvin (1960), common grace is not circumscribed to restraint and preservation. Further to an emphasis on restraint, he upholds the incidences of special grace which are instances of sporadic endowment of certain people with gifts from God's Spirit for the common good of mankind. As illustrations, Calvin (1960) embraces the special gifts of understanding and knowledge given to the Tabernacle craftsperson, and the case of the Spirit coming upon Saul and David such that its value protracted to the whole course of their government. Moreover, Calvin (1960) appeals to the special endowments of virtue and strength given to people like the noble Camillus, and the heroes and princes in Homer, illuminating that these are special graces of God. Even here, though, Calvin is watchful to confirm that such virtue, strength and moral integrity rest not in the persons themselves, but in the gracious Spirit of God.

Hodge (1982) treading on the same path with Calvin links general revelation and the restraint of sin as he asserts that

common grace is the restraining and persuading impacts of the Holy Spirit acting only through the truth divulged in the gospel, or through the natural light of reason and of conscience, intensifying the natural moral outcome of such reality upon the understanding, conscience and heart. It encompasses no alteration of heart, but merely an improvement of the natural powers of the truth, a restraint of the evil appetites, and an upsurge of the natural emotions in view of sin, duty, and self-interest. Following Edwards (1972), it appears, total depravity is likeminded with moral and intellectual goodness in the unregenerate precisely because such goodness is absolutely ascribed to a divine restraint of sin and preservation of the created order. At this juncture, many critics have accused both Calvin and his associates of restraining common grace to a negative purpose of restraint and preservation, such that God's gracious determinations in the world are perceived to be a type of delaying, a holding in temporary cessation the tide of evil and leaving the unregenerate without justification until the elect are saved at the last day. Such criticisms are illogical, definitely when Calvin's (1960) position is criticized, particularly his rhapsodic litany of both human goodness and capacities in virtue, science, the liberal arts, and the civic sphere in Inst. II.2.12-17, but also the justly multidimensional form which many Reformed theologians allude to common grace. This nature of analysis is presented by Robert Johnston (1999), who erroneously accuses Calvin and his cliques of defining common grace only in negative terms of restraint or preservation. Irrefutably, in contrasting what he reflects, is Calvin's view and that of Calvinist theologian Herman Bavinck, Johnston ends up arguing for exactly their own position, that God's purposes in common grace are further than redeeming, and relate as much to creation as to re-creation. Like Calvin and Bavinck, Johnston argues that common grace is both convicting and convincing; both preserving order and providing what is good. All these rudiments are, though, present in both Calvin and Bavinck.

Consequently, in the endowments of special gifts, Calvin (1960) again resolves what seems to be natural goodness in human

beings with the gracious provision of God, and hence is able to defend total depravity. Therefore, these gifts of non-salvific wisdom, goodness and virtue are special graces of God, which he bequeaths variously and in a measure upon men otherwise wicked. As Til (2015) says that irreligious authors that yet replicate God's truth, it should first reiterate that although fallen, the human mind yet is decorated with gifts from its creator. Grudem (2009) similarly argues that when unbelievers have great understanding and intelligence, the partial truth they have must be seen as a result of God's grace.

The gifts and talents are distributed in varying degrees undeniably. Some are endowed with beautiful voices; others might be physically strong, while some might simply have the gift of a positive attitude. More so, it is known that every good gift comes from God (James 1:17), and this includes our individual talents (1 Cor. 4:7), for what do we individually have that we did not receive? These gifts and talents must be known as a blessing from God, they are blessings to both the receiver and, to the level that they are used in the world, to one and all. humans are endowed with the gift of inventing machines. Christian thought on science and the arts can properly be summed up in the apostle Paul's doxology in Romans 11:36. Hence, all true science is God's science, and all true art is God's art, as whatever is true must be of God (Heslam, 1998). There are most admirable blessings which the Divine Spirit bestows to whom he will for the common use of humanity. For instance, the skill and knowledge of the building of Tabernacle was imparted to Bezaleel and Aholiab, by the Spirit of God (Exod. 31:2; 35:30). Every progression in human learning, every work of art, and every scientific unearthing is purely God flipping his book of creation and illuminating His truth to us (Keller, 2003). The knowledge of those things which are of the highest excellence in human life is said to be transferred to us by the Spirit. More so, the natural man is able to do good in things civil, by virtue of the influence of God upon him which is not regenerative (De Mots, 2000). Hoeksema and Schilder (qtd. in

Til 2015) deny common grace in totality, due to the opposition that God cannot display his favour to those under his wrath. This position lacks backup as portrayed in Matthew and Luke.

### **Matthean and Lukan Pericopes on Common Grace**

Matthew 5:44, 45 speaks of sunshine and rain and is interpreted to mean that sunshine and rain are evidences of God's grace. Because the sun shines on everyone and because rain falls everywhere, God's grace is also upon everyone. Luke 6; 35, 36 speaks in terms of God's kindness towards the unthankful and evil. The interpretation of this, then, is that kindness is like rain and sunshine and is evidence of grace to all, all men being the unthankful and evil. Acts 14:17 speaks of the fact that God did not leave Himself without witness, but testified that He is God by doing good, giving rain from heaven along with fruitful season, and filling men's hearts with food and gladness. This witness of God is interpreted to refer to God's grace and favor that He shows to all men. Murray (1976) describes benefits of God's grace to mankind as expressions of God's kindness, mercy, and love. Discovering evidence for God's love for all men in Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:27, 35, he articulates that there is a love in God that goes out to fallen humanity and is showed in the multiple blessings which all people without difference enjoy, a love in which unregenerate persons are incorporated, and a love that comes to its maximum expression in the appeals, offers and demands of gospel declaration. Calvin (2014) argues logically that humans are by nature learners; their cerebral endowments are gifts from God. This is expressed in the arts, sciences, and political directive explicitly. To Calvin though humanity is crooked as a result of sin, however, there were natural endowments that had been given to him by the Spirit of God (54).

In elaborating on common grace, Kuiper (1928) expresses that God sends to the wicked earthly blessings as the fruits of His kindness, in order to persuade them of His genuine disposition to confer upon them the greater gift of redemption in Christ. He

Shines in All That's Fair' is a reassessment of certain matters complicated in the common grace controversy in the Christian Reformed Church in the early 1920s. The curiosity of Mouw (2019) is that part of common grace that comprises of a non-saving love of God for the reprobate in this life. In His common grace love for the non-elect, God is thought to desire their earthly good, to bless them with temporal blessings, to pity them in their earthly woes, and to give them His Holy Spirit, keeping them from being totally depraved and enabling them to perform good works in society. Common grace accounts for the seeming good in undegenerated unbelievers, about whom the Reformed faith confesses in Question and Answer 8 of the Heidelberg Catechism that they are hitherto debauched that they are absolutely unapt to any good, and prone to all evil (Heidelberg Catechism, 310). Common grace also becomes the basis of friendship between Christian and non-Christian. Especially, common grace is accelerative as the basis of cooperation between believers and unbelievers in working together for a good culture.

Mouw (2019) adduces Luke 6:35 in support of common grace. This text brought controversy on common grace in Reformed circles. Others erroneously interpret it as supporting universal salvation. The text is part of the passage beginning with verse 27 in which Jesus calls His disciples to love their enemies. He construes Luke 6:35 that, God has a positive, though non-salvific, regard for those who are not elect, a regard that he asks his own to nurture in their own souls, the unthankful and evil to whom God is kind, are all humans without exception, predominantly those men and women whom God has eternally reprobated. God is kind to reprobate unthankful and evil men with a non-saving, common grace kindness. The sister passage in Matthean pericope, Jesus reverses the normal philosophy of loving your neighbour and hating your enemy to loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the

righteous and the unrighteous.....Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:43-48). Treading on the same path, France (1985) comments on the Matthew 5:45, that indiscriminating love will mark disciples out as the sons of the Father, for the son shares the father's oddity, and it is the character of God to dispense his natural blessings on all alike. Nothing is said here, obviously, about spiritual blessings; the verse gives no guarantee for a belief in universal redemption.

### **A Reaction to Nigerian Experience of Irrepressible Bloodbaths**

The uncontrollable killings on daily basis in Nigeria make one trembles whether God really restrains evil in the world or not. Shiver runs through one's spine innumerable times. The author is bamboozled over the gravity of incessant bloodshed in Nigeria since the inception of Buhari administration hitherto. Terrorism is unprecedented during President Muhammadu Buhari government and its target is on Christians whereas the government is doing absolutely nothing to avert the problem. Instead, the government allegedly supports terrorists in the name of rehabilitation and vice versa. If God truly restrains evil in the world as asserted by Reformed Calvinists, then why are Muslim-killings of Christians go through the ceiling in Nigeria? A foremost bone of contention for many in deciding whether to embrace a belief in God is the problem of evil and suffering in the world. Is God in absolute control of everything that happens in the world? The controversy is to reconcile God's sovereignty with human suffering and affliction. How does a Christian apply the sovereignty of God when Boko Haram and Fulani terrorists kill, rape and maim their loved ones helplessly every day? Egbuogu (2006) opines that the human pain and suffering are so realistic and it is so common that human beings cannot detach themselves from the thought of it. From time immemorial evil has been a thorn in the flesh of humanity. If God is in control, and if He is a loving God, how could He have allowed such a horrifyingly herdsmen' evil occurrences in

Nigeria? However, God is infinite in His imperial self-existence. His capacities and capabilities far surpass the scope of human reasons.

Augustine's (1955) *De Libero Arbitrio*, or On Free Will, is a discourse with Evodius. Augustine asserts: "We believe that everything which exists is created by one God, and yet that God is not the cause of sin. The difficulty is: if sins go back to souls created by God, and souls go back to God, how can we avoid before long tracing sin back to God?". In retort, Augustine avers his critical solution by blaming the human free will as the culpable source of sin. Evidently, people do evil consistent with the verdicts rendered by their minds. Augustine (1955) contends that God compels no one to sin, though He foresees those who will sin by their own will. Since there is no direct causal relation between foreknowledge and a person's choice, Augustine deduces that it is safe to assert that one's will can truly be spoken of as free, and thus, blameable for its election to sin. What Augustine has definitively stated thus far is that God is not culpable for the presence of evil. For the will is the source of evil, God gave the will for the use of good, God's foreknowledge cohabits pleasantly with man's free will, and God is just in judging sinners, since their sin is the result of free will. By so doing, Augustine's notion of the will in *De Libero Arbitrio* is rather unrestrained. It lies in the will what each person chooses to seek and attach oneself to. Moreover, he elucidates that God knows all things before they come to pass, and that humans do by their free will whatsoever they know and feel to be done by them only because they will it. (Augustine, 1993). Considering the foregoing, Fulani herders are the prime prey to misuse of freewill so vice finds its source in their will. The culpability for evil, still rests squarely on the will and not on God.

The ranking of Nigeria on the Global Terrorism Index Report by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) as the third country with the highest level of terrorism in 2019, after Iran and Afghanistan, is not only alarming but bothersome. This,

though, did not come as a shock to intense security and political watchers in the country due to the deteriorating security status quo in the country in recent times. Barely any day passes without data of one felonious attack or the other in various parts of Nigeria. More exasperating is the fact that the worsening security situation in the country has continued to take its toll on Nigerians as many lives are lost on a daily basis and assets worth millions of naira go down the drain in the process. We are awfully nervous that no applied steps are taken by the Buhari administration to check the security debacle. What the current Global Terrorism Index Report infers is that the applauded success chronicled by the present administration is a mere fluke. The Federal Government has persistently and consistently told Nigerians that it has decimated Boko Haram and insurgency in the country. But on the contrary, there is nothing on ground to show that the fight against insurgency in the country is abating.

Nte (2016) contended that most of the very fierce crises prompted by Fulani Herdsmen arose in the middle-belt of Nigeria in general and Plateau, Benue and Taraba States to be specific. For Benue State there have been extremely shocking crises that have killed so many lives and assets engendered by Fulani Herdsmen in communities of local government areas such as Agatu, Guma, Gwer West, Makurdi, Kwande, Katsina-Ala and Loggo. The communal crises triggered by Fulani herdsmen in Benue State had killed more than 5000 fatalities in the first six months of 2014. Consistent with statistics presented by the Institute for Economics and Peace, 1,229 people were killed in 2014, up from 63 in 2013 and Benue State appears to be the hardest hit in recent times. Only just five days to the end of Governor Gabriel Suswam's government in May 2015, over 100 farmers and their family members were reportedly slaughtered in villages and refugee camps situated in the Ukura, Per, Gafa and Tse-Gusa local government areas of the state. As stated by reports, in July 2015, suspected herdsmen attacked Adeke, a community on the vicinities of the state capital, Makurdi. Last December, six persons were killed



at Idele village in the Oju local government area. A revenge mission by youths in the community claimed the lives of three Fulani herdsmen.

During their open grazing, herders regularly encroach farmlands owned by residents in their host communities, destroying crops and valuables. Efforts by farmers to foil them from causing chaos are met with stiff and fierce confrontation. In most cases, the farmers are crushed, wounded and killed, while others are ejected from their homes. Occasionally, the herdsmen are accused of taking these opportunities to steal, rape, raze houses and kill innocent affiliates of the communities they navigate (Kwaghga, 2018). Every day, the lives of Nigerians are wasted by the insurgents and bandits. From Plateau and Benue States to Borno, Yobe, Katsina, Zamfara and Adamawa States, the story is the same. The way things are currently going further shows that the claim that terrorists have infiltrated into the Army and other security agencies in the country is a reality. It is apparent Kaduna State is increasingly becoming the cynosure of banditry in Nigeria. Southern Kaduna precisely is fast whirling into a killing field. Freshly, bandits alleged to be Fulani herdsmen struck in the southern part of the State, cutting down people by the score.

In 2014, an approximately 1,200 persons died as a result of herdsmen attacks in 2015, Global Terrorism Index (GTI) graded herdsmen as the World's fourth deadliest militant group for having been accountable for about 1,229 human massacres in 2014 (Agbu, Musa & Zhema, 2020). From June 2015 to January 2016, 525 peoples were killed, not below 1,750 human death rates in the first six months of 2018, adding 5,275 human deaths from 2015 to June 2018. Nevertheless, in 2016 alone, an estimated 2,500 people were slaughtered by Fulani terrorists and have caused the dislodgment of no less than 62,000) people, most of them women and children, in the stiffest hit States of Kaduna, Benue and Plateau (ICG, 2017). Global Terrorism Index 2019: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, deaths from terrorism in

Nigeria rose to 2,040 in 2018, a 33% increase (Agbu Musa & Zhema, 2020).

Apart from deaths resulting from such battles, there is a humanitarian crisis related to internal displacement. It is valued that over 620,000 people have been displaced in Nigeria's Middle Belt states of Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau where the conflicts are more intense (Awotokun et al., 2020). The general impact of these conflicts, beyond the loss of lives in the affected states, is the enduring dislocation and the attendant humanitarian and economic crises of huge proportions. As, in Benue state alone, herdsman-farmers' conflicts have led to economic costs of over N400 billion resulting from the demolition of properties over the years. The record of death toll on Boko Haram fights in 2018 displayed a fatality rate of 2,016 persons, a sign that herders-farmers' conflicts were deadlier than the Boko Haram terrorist bloodbath. Aside, the fatalness of the Fulani herders, the government's retort has been poor and lacklustre. The Fulani herders reached infamy in 2014 when they were classified as a terrorist group and measured the fourth noxious group as a result of having killed 1, 229 people. The Fulani herders are still very fatal in view of the overflow of reports of attacks, ransom kidnapping, and deaths allied to them. In spite of the international cataloguing of Fulani herders as terrorists, the Nigerian government condoned their acts (Awotokun et al. 2020). The researcher observes that the crises are now snowballing into tribal and religious clashes as seen in Southern Kaduna, where Christians are being killed by Muslims on daily basis. The killing is a threat on national integration. Violent between Nigerian herders and farmers intensified in early 2018 with almost 300,000 people absconding their homes. In Nigeria, terrorist activity is dominated by Fulani extremists and Boko Haram insurgents. Collectively, they are responsible for 78% of terror-related events and 86% of deaths from terrorism (GTI 2019).

Herders-farmers' conflicts have had damaging security implications for Nigeria such as giving signal to the international community that Nigeria is unsafe for even ordinary visit. The widespread insecurity in the North has caused decline in the development of the country with implication for human, economic, political, security and psychological dimensions. Insecurity is a drain on national resources at the expense of people's well-being. The adverse effects of insecurity on the economic growth and development of a nation are quite enormous (Dasam and Ibe, 2018). Nigeria's security status quo is deteriorated by the indecision of the government and its security agencies amid the bellicosity and bloodbath orchestrated by the Fulani herdsmen and the cohesion and backing offered by the pro-Fulani groups like Miyetti Allah KautalHore, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) and Fulani Nationality Movement (FNM). It would seem that the arouser for the increase in the ferocity that has swathed the Nigerian political space for years now through the Fulani herdsmen is the liking of the federal government to be indifferent to their vicious acts and its reluctance to prosecute them. Regardless of the national and global outrage on the activities of the Fulani herdsmen, none of them has been fruitfully indicted (Awotokun et al. 2020). Fulani terrorists, use AK 47 arms, organize guerrilla attacks on agrarian communities mostly by taking them unawares in their sleep to kill and set others ablaze.

The nature of the herdsmen attacks reinforce terror; the targets are the main areas of Christian settlements. The Fulani herdsmen and attackers are predominantly Muslims, thus giving the whole saga a religious configuration. This fear has been severally expressed by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to the Federal Government under the leadership of Muhammadu Buhari. The view that is held by a cross-section of analysts is that the attacks represent a surreptitious strategy of advancing jihad to the non-Muslims areas of the country through the well-known jihadist tools of intimidation,

destruction and carnage (Awotokun et al., 2020). The 2022 report by the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (Intersociety) asserts that in three months, January to March 2022, single-handedly, more than 900 Christians were killed by Boko Haram militants and armed Fulani herdsmen. The country has in the past fifteen months or January 2021 to March 2022 documented overall Christian demises of no less than 6006, Intersociety utters in the report dated April 5, adding that in the first three months of 2022 or January to March, not less than 915 have been killed (Aineah, 2022).

### **Recommendations on Restraint of Evil in the Nigerian Context**

The paper proffered solutions through recommendations on restraint of evil to curb Nigerian experience of bloodbaths.

1. Anti-open grazing law should be enforced across the country to restrain the movements of terrorists in the guise of seeking for greener pasture. There ought to be a restraint in their moment with provision of ranching reserves for
2. Global modern ranching can be trailed as one of the thinkable models in areas with lesser population densities in the North East like Sambisa Game Reserve in Borno State and North West, Gidan Jaja Grazing Reserve in Zamfara State.
3. Also, there is need for proper mechanism of checking the proliferation of weapons in the hands of non-state actors and terrorists who use these weapons to perpetrate illegal and heinous acts against the civilians.
4. The government should equip and deploy security agents to go after Fulani and Boko Haran terrorists instead of protecting them.

5. Nigerian government should desist from granting amnesty to so called repentant Fulani and Boko Haran terrorists
6. Fulani and Boko Haran terrorists who have surrendered should be prosecuted accordingly instead of recruiting them in the Nigerian army or reintegrating them into the society in the name of amnesty
7. Nigerian Society should implement state and community policing like Amotekon in the South West to checkmate the escapes of terrorism
8. Boko Haran sponsors and Miyetti Allah should be brought to book with immediate effect for sponsoring and fueling attacks on agrarian communities in Nigeria
9. Sequel to bloodbaths to quell the menace of jihadism nations should embark upon a restructuring agenda to demarcate its democratic society into six geo-political independent regions so as to foster unity.

### **Conclusion**

From the point of departure, the paper argues through outcomes, reveals that it seemed as though evil had triumphed and with impunity, boasting in the defeat of all goodness. This is the situation Nigerians and other nations are facing today; what seems to be the vilest administration of the terrorists by the terrorists for the terrorists so the recycling rhythms is bloodbaths everywhere. Evil parades itself, taunts the righteous, gloats in its apparent victory over all that was at one time considered good and decent. The study unfolds that, though the efficacy of common grace on restraint sustains, in God's permissive will as He permits sin or evil to occur. God

allows man to rebel against Him, and in this God permits people to do such things as lie, steal, killing and the like (Jer. 19.5, Lk 8.32, Rom 1.21-23). To say that God “allows” or “permits” evil does not mean that He sanctions it in the sense that He approves of it. That is, He does not directly intervene to prevent it. Here is where grave dangers lurk. Some theologies view this drama as if God were impotent to do anything about irrepressible bloodbaths in Nigeria. Evil and human suffering are inseparable in themselves. One cannot speak of evil without relating it to suffering, because it is a stunning subject, a really baffling puzzle, not just because of its mere presence but because of its pervasive, senseless and gratuitous form. The existence of evil and tragic happenings in Nigeria are inescapable because in God’s permissive will, He allows bloodbaths without his sanction but still under restraint. Common Grace, of course, is time bound. The clock of common grace is speedily ticking away and will soon be fatigued forever when the lawless one will be revealed. The study submits in stronger terms that God punishes perpetrators of evil; Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Herod and the like.

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