

Re-reading Psalm 133 in Fostering Unity, Peace in Nation Building, and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is said to be one of the leading religiously plural countries of the world. Statistics show that almost 90 percent of the population are either professed Christian or professed Muslim. Some regions of the country are more religiously plural than others.⁵²⁴ Some regions of the country are homogeneous religiously. It is observed that those regions that are heterogeneous religiously are more tolerant and live harmoniously together than those that are religiously homogenous. Religious intolerance is more noticeable among those regions that are homogenous. It has been observed that the unity of the country has been affected especially on the ethnic drive in the first two decades following the independence. Unfortunately, today religion has polarized the country since the 70s. This has caused Nigerian leaders to manipulate the Nigerian population thereby polarizing the country on religious sentiments and differences. Toyin Falola observed that most riots in Nigeria had undertones of religious dominance, who controls the state, the secular or religious character of the state and the

⁵²⁴ Robert A. Dowd, "Christianity, Islam and Political Culture: the Case of Nigeria.," in *Religious Ideas and institutions: Transitions to Democracy in Africa*. Ed. Edmond J. Keller and Ruth Iyob. (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2012), 83-84.

nature of the legal system.⁵²⁵ He further stated that bitter rivalries and conflicts existed between Christians and Muslims are said to be “open, common and permanent feature(s) of (Nigeria’s) politics.”⁵²⁶ Most conflicts are caused by the uncompromising extremists and die hard religious fanatics. These conflicts are not evenly distributed across the country. Christianity and Islam are said to be vastly spreading especially the sub-Sahara Africa. Most problem with the continent of Africa is the encouragement of “tolerance and moderation or intolerance and extremism”⁵²⁷ in both Christian and Muslim religious communities.

Religion is as old as the creation. This is because the creator has wired into humanity the desire to relate to the numinous. However, there is diversity in the experience of the people especially when it comes to response to the experience of the sacred, which have resulted into production of priests, rabbis, ulema, gurus – who preside over sacred rituals and lead communal worship. These religious leaders have formulated doctrines, enforce moral/ethical teachings.⁵²⁸ Irrespective of whatever background any religionist comes from especially the traditional ones (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), God is seen as “the ultimate source of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful; Satan, the destructive aspect of the numinous, is banished from the godhead.”⁵²⁹

Fundamental to the conflicts being experienced today among the religionists is the struggle to adhere to traditional beliefs and moral codes in which each is trying to enforce. This tradition is plural in form which is cumulatively developed over the ages in concrete and

⁵²⁵ Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*. (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1998), 167.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵²⁷ R. Scott Appleby, “

⁵²⁸ R. Scott Appleby, “Religion, Fundamentalism and Conflict,” in *Gods and Arms: On Religion and Armed Conflict*. Ed. Kjell-Ake Nordquist. (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 2.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

changing situations. The internal pluralism of the religious tradition (multiplicity of its teachings, the images of the divine and moral injunctions are what the leaders try to enforce. It, thus, behooves the religious leaders to select whatever is felt appropriate doctrine or norm in a given situation, which are the determinant factors of “what is orthodox or heretical, moral or immoral, permitted or forbidden”⁵³⁰ at any given particular moment.

This paper adopts multi-dimensional historical cum exegetical and hermeneutical approaches. This is necessary to look at what the Holy Bible says about unity in order to channel a course for all religious groups in the country to demonstrate and arbitrate a common ground to face the challenges that confront the country headlong. This is to result into working a better tomorrow. There is the need to construct a bridge of peace through fundamental teachings of the Bible to foster peaceful co-existence and sustainable development among the populace.

Exegetical Scrutiny of Psalm 133

Psalm 133 is the fourteenth of the fifteen Psalm of the Songs of Ascents (120-134). It is a Psalm that concerns Zion. It is a Psalm of celebration when people gathered together to celebrate the three annual pilgrimage feasts.⁵³¹ It is a psalm that focuses much on family unity. There should be peace among brothers and sisters. “Unity is like the refreshing and life-giving dew on Mount Hermon.”⁵³² David in this Psalm renders thanks to God who had enabled him succeeded a long and melancholy state of confusion and division that had pervaded the kingdom. God had granted his kingdom peace and harmony and that he would exhort all individuals to help in the

⁵³⁰ R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 32.

⁵³¹ Richard J. Clifford, *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Psalms 73-150*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 259.

⁵³² Alton H. McEachern, *Layman’s Bible Book Commentary: Psalms*, Vol. 8. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1981), 150.

maintenance of peace. There was enough ground and ample opportunity to express praise to the goodness of God in the highest terms. After succeeding the hostility of the divided kingdom, God had united the fragmented kingdom into one a people. The existing feud and hostility that had so divided them is abolished and nothing else can stand in opposition to hold out the prospect of peace. The hand of God was wonderfully seen among them and most unexpectedly in the ensued concord among them. Atmosphere of unity had brought peace that would eventually engender development.⁵³³ This background story is corroborated by Matthew Poole who said that

This Psalm was composed by David upon the happy occasion of the ending of the civil war between the two houses of Saul and David; in which, having felt the sad effects of discord and division, both the king and people were more sensible of the great blessing of reconciliation and unity. David extolled the benefit and excellence of the unity and brotherly communion of the faithful (God).⁵³⁴

A Plea to Restore Social Concern through Unity – v. 1

Psalm 133:1 שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְדָוִד הִנֵּה מֵהַטּוֹב וּמֵהַנְּעִים שְׁבֹת אֲחִים גַּם־יַחַד:

Transliteration- shir hama^aloth l^edawid hinneh mah-tov uma-na'im sheveth gam-yachad

Rough Translation –song of the stair up to David. Behold! How a good thing/pleasant? And how agreeable/pleasant/lovely to dwell brothers/fellow tribesmen yea unitedly.

⁵³³ John Calvin, "Commentary on Psalms 133:1." *Calvin's Commentary on the Bible*. September 12, 2018.
<https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/cal/psalms-133.html>. 1840-57.

⁵³⁴ Matthew Poole, "Commentary on Psalms 133:1," in *Matthew Poole's English Annotations on the Holy Bible*. September 10, 2018.
<https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/mpc/psalms-133.html>. p. 1685.

Smooth Translation – A Song of Ascent. Of David. Behold! How pleasant or a good thing and how lovely for fellow tribesmen to dwell unitedly!

The passage started with an opening word הִנֵּה – meaning behold! An exclamation mark that opens the Psalm, Behold is particularly expressive. It is not only setting the state of things visibly before the eyes, but it is suggesting an implicit contrast between the delightfulness of peace and those civil commotions which had denigrated and rent the kingdom asunder. David in gratitude sets forth the goodness of God in exalted terms. The Israelites had long experience of internal feuds, which had hitherto gone far in ruining the nation. He now expressed what he had learned - the inestimable value of unity!⁵³⁵

David is like saying that those of us who were naturally brothers/kinsmen, see how we had become so divided, brothers viewing one another with a more bitter hatred than any foreign foe. Behold, now how lovely and pleasant to cultivate a spirit of brotherly concord!

This is a Psalm with allusion to Deuteronomy 25:5, which refers to an extended family living at close quarters. It is a praise for the family reunions which the pilgrim feasts have made possible. The passage emphasizes the theme of togetherness, which is the core value of unity. It should be noted that all Israelites are brothers in God's sight (see Deut. 15:3, 12; 25:3).⁵³⁶ Richard J. Clifford offers that the accurate translation of traditional brother should better be kindred as New Revised Standard Version translated it. He averred that the Hebrew word bear much reference “to men and women in kin relationship with each other; they are descendants of a common

⁵³⁵ Calvin.

⁵³⁶ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms*. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press 1973), 452.

ancestor and share the same history. The people themselves are a witness to God's call."⁵³⁷

James Nisbet in *Church Pulpit Commentary* quips: "Some things are good, but not pleasant; others are pleasant, but not good; it is not easy to combine the two qualities; but in unity both converge; pleasantness and the highest good."⁵³⁸ Tony Evans expressed the importance of unity this way "Many things are good, but not pleasant. Other things are pleasant, but not good. Here is something morally good and emotionally pleasant about getting along with others."⁵³⁹

Picturesque of Priestly Anointing – v. 2

Psalm 133:2 כִּשְׁמֵן הַטּוֹב | עַל-הָרֹאשׁ יֵרֵד | עַל-הַזָּקָן וְקַוְאֵהָרֹן | שֵׁיֵרֵד | עַל-פִּי מְדוּחָיו:

Transliteration- kash^eshemen hattov al-haro'sh yored 'al-haz^ezaqan z^e qan-'ah^aron sey^eyored 'al-pey mid^edothayu

Literal Translation – as/like oil the good one upon the head coming down upon the beard the beard of Aaron which coming down upon the mouth of his garment.

Smooth Translation – Like precious oil coming down upon the head of Aaron down to his beard and running down to the edge of his garment.

The picturesque of Aaron is used as an illustration and figure of integration of a priest and his robes. The blessings of the Lord are the exclusive preserve of a few but are free to spread and be shared, unifying all the recipients just as oil intended for the head also spread

⁵³⁷ Clifford. 259.

⁵³⁸ James Nisbet, "Commentary on Psalms 133:1," in *Church Pulpit Commentary*. September 10, 2018. <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/cpc/psalms-133.html>. (p. 1876).

⁵³⁹ Jim Elwin, "Psalm 133:1-3 How to Live in Harmony." September 10, 2018. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jimerwin/2016/07/11/psalm-1331-3-live-harmony/>

beyond the head (see Exod. 29:7). In Exodus 29:21, it is explicitly stated that after pouring the oil on the head, some were sprinkled on the robes.⁵⁴⁰

The primary reference to oil running down the head of Aaron is a metaphor of abundance suggestive of “plenitude and generosity.”⁵⁴¹ It should be noted that Moses ordained Aaron to the priesthood leadership position by anointing his head with oil (see Lev. 8:12). It suffices to also note that in a hot dry climate, oil may be very soothing to the body.⁵⁴² This scenario shows the brilliance shining, glistening, colourful ceremonies carried out to legitimizing priestly ordination. Clifford observed that oil can further mean “the oil dispensed by generous hosts so their guests can anoint themselves before a meal ... (see Luke 7:44-46) the metaphor refers to both worship and festive meals, which is precisely the theme of the psalm.”⁵⁴³

The fragrant anointing oil poured over Aaron’s head and trickled down his long beard up to the edge of his garment is reminiscent of his divine commissioning (see 1 Sam. 9:1). This actually set him aside as Yahweh’s mediator at the sanctuary.⁵⁴⁴

The Proverbial Dew of Hermon – v. 3

כְּטַל־חֶרְמוֹן שִׁירַרְרִי עַל־חַרְרֵי צִיּוֹן כִּי שָׁם צִנָּה יְהוָה אֶת־תְּבַרְכָּהּ חַיִּים

עַד־הָעוֹלָם: **Psalm 133:3**

Transliteration – k^etal-cher^emon shey^eyored ‘al-har^erey tsiy^eyon kiy sham tsiw^ewah y^ehowah ‘eth-hab^eb^erakah chay^eiyim ‘ad-ha’olam

⁵⁴⁰Kidner, 452-453.

⁵⁴¹ Clifford, 260.

⁵⁴² Cyril Okorochoa, “Psalms,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*. Ed Tokunboh Adeyemo. (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006), 735.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Allen, 215

Literal Translation – like/as dew of Hermon which came down upon the mount of Zion that there he really commanded Yahweh the blessing lives as far as long duration

Smooth Translation – Like the dew of Hermon that comes upon Mount Zion; for it is there that Yahweh really (indeed) commanded his blessing even life forever more.

Hermon is the highest mountain in Israel and receives heavy dew but this is also true of the little Mount Zion that receives the same gift. There is virtually no rain between the months of May to September but the Mediterranean climate of Palestine enjoys dew. Dew was very important supplement of rain in summer. Dew that falls overnight refreshes the land and plant. Zion therefore constitute a place of fertility even in a rainless season because it enjoys abundance of dew just as the northern mighty Hermon.⁵⁴⁵ True unity like all good gifts is from above; it is bestowed and not contrived, it is a blessing far outweighs personal efforts and achievement.⁵⁴⁶ “Unity in Zion and within the congregation of the people of God is a blessing, ‘life for evermore’ (v.3).”⁵⁴⁷ Thus, Allen said “the last line of the Psalm is then generally understood as subordinate to the first, a commendation of brotherly unity as a prelude to divine blessing.”⁵⁴⁸ The dew is “a simile with positive overtones of divinely sent refreshment. It lends itself easily to spiritual application, as in Hosea 14:5.”⁵⁴⁹

It is worthwhile to note what really follows dwelling together in unity. It is a divine blessing. The stem of the verb being used is not an ordinary one. It is a verb in piel stem in a perfect tense. A verb in a piel stem is intensive and carries with it a sense of urgency. The blessing that comes out of unity is divinely commanded and it is a

⁵⁴⁵ Okorochoa, 261.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 453

⁵⁴⁷ McEachern, 150.

⁵⁴⁸ Leslie C. Allen, Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 101-150. Vol. 21. Eds. David A. Hubbard, et al. (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher 1983), 213.

⁵⁴⁹ Allen, 215.

completed action with sense of urgency and intensity. Oh what a great loss for a society where there is division, rancor and acrimony reigning in the midst of people! God is resolutely committed to bless people that entrench unity and dwell harmoniously together. It is in an atmosphere of unity that love, peace and development thrives. Antidote of the predicament that has befallen the country is unity. Let all religious leaders be resolutely and doggednessly committed to the pursuit of unity. United we stand but divided we fall.

Five Principles of Unity

Blake Coffee⁵⁵⁰ listed five principles of unity that can be of tremendous aid to the subject matter. These are: the principle of the Spirit, the principle of the enemy, the principle of perceptions, the principle of accountability and the principle of focus.

The physiological dimension of human body best explains the concept of unity. Body is a unity; hence, religion should not divide and polarize the country. Different functions of the members of the body gives the basis for diversity. Multiplicity of religion should be of advantage to Nigerians as this gives room for diversity. The creator combined all parts of the body and encourages all parts to function in perfect harmony. He even honors the weaker parts (see 1 Cor. 12:24-25).

What to do!

The Psalm teaches the importance of maintaining a communal spirit. The community that gathered in Jerusalem were eager to worship and were open to fellow Israelites. They were encouraged as they sensed the kindness and generosity of God within the community. The Psalmist directs all to see the reality of being brothers and sisters, members of the family of God. There is wonder in a united community as the resources of the lyric poetry portrays. How

⁵⁵⁰ Blake Coffee, *Five Principles of Unity*, 3rd edition. (Houston, Texas: Christian Unity Ministry, 2007), 5.

marvelous will be a gift of unity and blessings that would accrue to the community! It is high time that all religious leaders should propagate spirit of communalism eschew divisive messages and embrace unity for the well sought-after peace and sustainable development to take place.

LeRoy Eims shared his observation over the years and says “People who are united in hearts and minds receive the blessing of God on their lives and ministry. This united spirit is certainly one of the keys that unlocks the blessing of God and unleashes the power of God. Without this, the group invariably falls into disarray; morale sinks, and whatever motivation they had disappears.”⁵⁵¹ It is high time for Nigerian religious leaders to be advocates of unity; they teach, preach and practice unity in order for the country to enjoy rapid social, economic and infrastructural development that have been so elusive.

Unity is a rare virtue. It is expected that a close-knit family should naturally be united and happy, which in many times may not be truly so. Unity as a virtue is a tripod upon which “goodwill and hard work can produce an attractive picture of domestic harmony.”⁵⁵² Unity engenders progress, advancement and overall development.

Unity has a fragrance is contagious (Jn. 12:1-3), this is because the anointing oil has a lovely fragrance (see Exod. 30:22-31). The loveliness of fellowship cannot ever be over-emphasized. God’s blessings is guaranteed when people live and work together in unity. The full blown blessings that come from God is hindered in an atmosphere of discord, rancor and disharmony.⁵⁵³ It is high time that the religious leaders begin to pass around the fragrance of unity that

⁵⁵¹ LeRoy Eims, *Be a Motivational Leader: Lasting Leadership Principles*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2002), Chapter 11, Database © 2005 WORDsearch Corp.

⁵⁵² Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 73-150: Songs for the People of God*. Eds. J. A. Motyer, John R. W. Stott and Derek Tidwell. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 243.

⁵⁵³ Okorochoa, 735.

will lead the country towards the path of peace (for unity is all about oneness) and sustainable development.

There should exist mutual harmony among the citizenry that will engender peaceful coexistence and sustainable development. Mutual harmony should subsist amongst all religions as adjudged God's children or God's slaves/servants as the case may be. Religious leaders are exhorted to make every concerted effort to maintain mutual harmony. In as much as animosities are allowed, there is bound to be suspicion, distrust, disunity, ill feelings, definitely there shall be division, and all these cannot bring the much needed and cherished peaceful coexistence and sustainable development. There would be prevalence of heartaches and heart-burnings amongst the populace, with effectual fracture of relationship with God. The resultant effect of this is hindrance to prayers as the common relationship to God is injured, and there would not be audacity of presenting ourselves before God as priests (religious leaders) with the appearance of a broken and dismembered body. All human beings are one before God, our union and oneness must be ratified amongst us by reciprocal harmony, and fraternal love.

Many a time, some things may appear good and not pleasant; others may look pleasant and not good. It is, however, interesting to note that when these duo virtues combine, unity is the outcome. These two qualities converge in unity to result in pleasantness and the highest good for the community. Religious leaders must come to term on unity in order for the country to forge ahead in fostering peaceful coexistence and experience the long elusive development that must as well be sustained. Apart from God factor, it is only the religious leaders that can really save the country from all her predicaments. Therefore, religious leaders must come together and forge a harmonious relationship in collaboration, tolerance and entrenchment/enthronement of unity.

Sin is trivialized today. It is not uncommon to see those who lead people to the presence of God engaging in the same sin in which they

condemn others. Sin has brought untold hardships on the people. Sin is highly consequential. There is poverty in the land as a few individuals have pocketed what belong to all. Civil unrest, political instability, cross-carpeting from one political platform to another, poverty, high scale monumental fraud, social dishonesty, political perfidy and disorientation are some of what brought peoples' reactions and varying agitation today. Today, many have mortgaged holiness and idolized money and cannot preach the truth. Sin has brought disunity in which all and sundry feel the pain of it, it is therefore needful to seek God's face in bringing unity. Humankind must see the need for renewal. Man mortgaged unity and only God can create and restore unity. There are myriads of study, discussions and organized conferences being put in place today, these can help to a certain level but only God can create unity.⁵⁵⁴

The plurality of religion should not divide the country for there is unity in diversity if these diversities are properly annexed. Human beings are to relate and harmoniously live together. Love is a primal theological teaching of every religion. Love must be well understood and practiced among different religious bodies. Love is the basis of unity. An atmosphere that is devoid of love is where disharmony thrive. As such, the dignity of human life would be compromised and denigrated.

The doctrine of accommodation should be entrenched and encouraged as this may checkmate the incessant attack of the religious extremists. Religious tolerance should be preached and encouraged among the adherents and the religious leaders are to lead in this campaign. Religious leaders should be vanguards and crusaders of religious tolerance and accommodation. There is more tolerance and accommodation in religious plural settings than that of the religious homogenous settings in Nigeria.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁴Oliver Wyon, *Praying for Unity*, (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1955), 5.

⁵⁵⁵Dowd, 93.

It is essential for the religious leaders to start advocating for their adherents to imbibe the empowerment of their members for peace-building and harmonious relationship through the discipline of discernment and radical Christ-like living.⁵⁵⁶ Conflict is inevitable in human society but social determinism to eschew all form of violence, hostility and aggression should be encouraged through building a peaceful and civil society.⁵⁵⁷

If religious leaders would dwell together in unity, which is good (like the dew) and pleasant (like the oil), there would be outpouring of blessings.⁵⁵⁸ Dwelling together in unity is a blessing of God coming down. This is not to say that human effort is compelling a divine response. Note that anywhere there is a wholehearted reaching up unto God, there elicits a corresponding reaching of God's blessing.⁵⁵⁹

THE ROLES OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN SECURING A JUST AND PEACEFUL SOCIETY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The roles to be played by the religious leaders in order to secure a just and peaceful society can be categorized into: active, passive, advocacy, leadership and conscience roles.

Active Roles: The religious leaders have the responsibility of sensitizing the democratic state which represents the public to actually be the monitor that regulates the failure of Nigerian markets on the one hand and ensures that practice of ethics and social justice on the other should guide all markets. Today, there is a tendency to

⁵⁵⁶ Paulos Widjaja, "A Foundational Theology of Peacebuilding," in *Seeking Peace in Africa: Stories from African Peacemakers*. Eds. Donald E. Miller, et al. (Geneva, Switzerland and Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: World Council of Churches, 2007), 40.

⁵⁵⁷ Paul Peachey, *Building Peace and Civil Society: An Autobiographical Report from a Believers' Church*. (Washington, D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2007), 35.

⁵⁵⁸ Wilcock, 244.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

discourage this from happening in spite of the fact that the current unregulated system has created several crises in the area of food, jobs, and ecology and has further widened the gap between the rich and the poor.

Nigerians are highly religious people. Israel Nonyerem Davidson quoting Hank Eso in his article “Nigeria Today: Who is to Blame – Religion or Nigerian or Both?” said:

Religion has a place in the lives of every nation, Nigeria inclusive. Irrespective of the faith or denomination, religion when truly practiced in its truest form and spirit, has been and remains sacred. It plays a vital role in purposeful leadership, community building, social justice, law and order, peace-making, reconciliation, forgiveness and the healing of wounds, be they political, family or personal.⁵⁶⁰

Income inequality, poverty among all but the very top few, lawlessness/selective law, unemployment, poor education system, bastardised healthcare system, and medieval infrastructure have culminated in unlashng a level of hardship and human suffering that have forced many to seek divine intervention through churches and mosques. Politicians have been quick to embrace religion too, turning up at churches and mosques, raising constituencies among their religious peers and allying themselves with specific Pastors and Imams. Unfortunate, nothing positive has emerged from the mix of politics and religion, either by way of economic growth, improved standard of living, reduction in unemployment, reduced corruption, improved infrastructure, or improved security of lives and assets. Consequently, it is not out of place finding Nigerians pointing

⁵⁶⁰[Israel Nonyerem Davidson](http://www.openmindfoundation.com/index.php/nigeria-today-who-is-to-blame-religion-nigerians-or-both/). “Nigeria Today: Who is to Blame – Religion or Nigerians or Both?” July 28, 2013.
<http://www.openmindfoundation.com/index.php/nigeria-today-who-is-to-blame-religion-nigerians-or-both/>

accusing fingers on religion as the root cause of the state of affairs in the country.⁵⁶¹

Abdurazaq O. Hamzat said in a speech delivered at the National Youth Discourse on Peace, Unity and integration at the Banquet Hall of Arewa House, Kaduna on Saturday 19th May 2012, organized by The Nigerian Youth Forum (NYF) said “at having resources or manpower; as most people feel, it is about having truth, because only truth builds a nation. The Truth is the only thing that makes you great, greatness built on lies and deceit ends up sorrowful. A nation built on Oil shall dry, that which is built on manpower shall be powerless, if built on a good land shall fade away, only nation that is built on truth shall survive.”⁵⁶²

At the heart of Christians’ faith lies "the God of peace" (Rom. 15:33), who desires peace for all people both far and near (Psa. 85; Isa. 57:19). The desire for peaceful existence has been fulfilled in Christ in whom humanity has been redeemed and reconciled. Today, the Holy Spirit continues to call Christians to seek peace with one another, so that in peace-making one may prepare for the coming of the reign of God, a kingdom of true justice, love and peace. God created the human family as one and calls it to unity. The renewed unity experienced in Christ is to be lived out in every possible way. All Christians are to live at peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18). Given the effects of sin, one’s efforts to live in peace with one another depend on his/her openness to God's healing grace and the unifying power of Christ's redemption. Change of mind and heart, of word and action are essential to those who would work for peace (Rom 12:2). This conversion to the God of peace has two dimensions. On the one hand, in imitation of Christ one must be humble, gentle and patient. On the other hand, Christians are called to be strong and active in the peace-making effort, loving one’s enemies and doing good generously as God does (Luke 6:35-36, 38), filled with eagerness to spread the

⁵⁶¹ Davidson.

⁵⁶²Hamsat.

gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15). After the discovery of God's peace, which exceeds all understanding, prayer is an essential ingredient of peace-making (Phil. 4:7). The peace given in prayer draws one unto God, quieting one's anxieties, challenging one's old values and deepening wells of new energy. It arouses a compassionate love for all humanity and gives one the heart to persevere beyond frustration, suffering and defeat. Peace is not merely something that one can do and can accomplish as God's creatures, but it is, in the ultimate analysis, a gift and a grace from God. By its nature, the gift of peace is not restricted to moments of prayer. It seeks to penetrate all facets of everyday life and to transform the world. Islamic religion is premised on peace. Islam comes from the root *salam* or *shalom*. These are Arabic and Hebrew translates as peace. It should not be difficult for Nigerian religious leaders to vigorously pursue and peace for both religion are rooted in peace and hold peace in high esteem.

Christianity and Islam have made great contributions in the field of education. There are many mission schools: nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions that produce quality graduates to serve the nation. This is about the greatest contribution of both the Church and Islam to development, because the greatest engine to growth and development of any economy is human capital development. The reduced activity of the religious institutions in the area of ownership and management of schools has impacted negatively on the quality of graduates available to serve national development.⁵⁶³ Christian and Islamic educators have the responsibility of providing a holistic training to students. Holistic training involves the training of the mind and the spirit of man. They balance up spiritual and training of a whole man. This is because man is a tripartite being; comprising of spirit, soul and body. Christian educators have motivation to do their work with excellence - the call of Christ on their lives enables them to do just that (1 Cor. 10:31, Col. 3:17). They provide quality education, which is also enhanced by the emphasis on subjects of morality and teaching about God to be of first

⁵⁶³Ibid., 66.

importance in addition to other things provided by the secular institutions. A religious focus will also inform the manner, content, and even the scope of an educational experience, and Christian and Islamic schools may be less influenced by cultural (or educational) fads. Provision of holistic education is made possible as the type of education made available in Christian schools is all embracing, all-encompassing and all involving. In spite of the fact that students were given freedom, yet they were not left to ruin their lives. Like those involved in pornography, drug addiction and other social vices; instead of being punished with expulsion as the case may be in the public schools, such students are being rehabilitated. There is the example of the rehabilitation programme organized for the Bowen University students at the Baptist College of Theology, Oyo.⁵⁶⁴

In the area of economic development, the Church in many parts of Nigeria as is practical in the Nigerian Baptist Convention establishing different vocational training centres all over the country. Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony said that Owerri Archdiocese, has established human development centres and programmes for the acquisition of skills for poverty eradication in the society. The Nigerian Baptist Convention established Bowen Micro-Finance Bank, Guest Houses, bookshops, print media to mention but few. Some dioceses like Nnewi Diocese, have also established micro-finance outfits all around to enable the rural and ordinary people save their money and buy shares. These banks grant loans, give professional advice on business and serve as a means of employment for the teeming population of the unemployed in the society.⁵⁶⁵ In its concern for economic development, Anthony said the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria issued the following documents: *Towards a Just Economy*, October 1960, *economics at the Service of Humanity*, February 1989,

⁵⁶⁴Jonathan Ola. Ojo and Abigail Adeleye. "Impact of Christian Higher Education in Nigeria," in *International Council of Higher Education (West Africa)*: Vol. 2, 2012:161-174.

⁵⁶⁵ Onwuliri, 73-74.

Privatization and Public Institutions, March 1990, Gap between the Rich and the Poor Grows, February 2002.⁵⁶⁶

Passive Role: the religious leaders can passively influence the society by being and playing the silent influence(r). The church as the called-out ones of the society can bear a lot of influence on the society through living to their spiritual mandate of being the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). When the church discharges its light-giving role, people will glorify God and not church.⁵⁶⁷ The lifestyles of the members of the church can send challenges to the members of the society through positive living. Church members should shun mundane things by pursuing things of eternal values. They should abhor all forms and appearances of evil. They should mortify the deeds of the flesh (Col. 3:5-8). Their lifestyles should point the way to God. Islamic leaders should live positive life of influence upon their followers. Enough of hate speeches and provocative and incite-ful messages.

Conscience Role: The religious leaders have the responsibility of being the conscience of the nation as they perform their prophetic role. The religious leaders by their mission and role has a prophetic responsibility in every society and nation. The prophets in the Old Testament were the conscience of the nation. They spoke in the name of God and denounced people's actions when they go contrary to the will of God. This is evident in their activities: Nathan reprimanded King David for his murderous action against Uriah (2 Sam. 12:13), Elijah confronted King Ahab and his wife Jezebel over Naboth's vineyard (I Kgs. 21:20-24).⁵⁶⁸ Prophetic mission involves direct confrontation with the causes of social and political oppression,

⁵⁶⁶Anthony, 17.

⁵⁶⁷ Howard Clark Kee. "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1971), 615.

⁵⁶⁸ Jude Uwalaka. "The Church as Conscience of a Nation," in *The Church as Agent of Progress and Development*, CIP Jubilee Essays. Ed. Izu Onyeocha, Owerri: Imo State University press, 2008), 106-107.

aiming at a historical change of the situation. This would involve the denunciation of real persons, social, economic and political institutions in so far as any of them violates justice. It involves the pursuit of justice for the poor and the oppressed. The basis for this focus is that injustice constitutes a serious violation of the express will of God. To achieve this, religious leaders are to participate in political action.⁵⁶⁹

More so, the religious leaders should be the bearers of the moral conscience of the nation and the society at large. They have the divine mandate of being the bearers of moral vision and moral force by bringing into the public arena the revealed truth of God.⁵⁷⁰ The religious leaders should set standards and preach the essence of sound morality; through the light which comes to her from their sacred books they are to continue to provide the principles for the correct organization of social life. The virtues of honesty, integrity, hard work, modesty, humility are all beacons of morality preached by all religions. Religion devoid of hypocrisy should be the mould character of the society. The ability of the religious leaders to play this role properly would result into an emergent of good and virile society, which will be significant for achieving genuine development. To achieve this, the members of the religious bodies must distance themselves from characters and behaviors that are scandalous and embarrassing.⁵⁷¹

Religion should be and she is the conscience of the nation. Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, the founder of the Kenyan Nation once said to the Catholic Archbishops of Eastern Africa, “The Church is the

⁵⁶⁹ Augustine Nebuchukwu. “The prophetic Mission of the Church in the Context of Social and Political Oppression in Africa,” in *Evangelization in Africa in the Third Millennium: Challenges and Prospects*. Ed. Justin Ukpong, et. al. (Port Harcourt: CIWA Press, 1992), 103.

⁵⁷⁰ Uwalaka, 105-106.

⁵⁷¹ Jude Njoku. “The Church as an Agent of Development”, in *The Church as Agent of Progress and Development, CIP Jubilee Essays*, Ed. Izu Onyeocha. (Owerri: Imo State University Press, 2008), 64.

conscience of the Society, and today a society needs a conscience. Do not be afraid to speak. If we go wrong and you keep quiet, one day you will answer for our mistakes.”⁵⁷² The Church is the community of faith who are called into being by the saving action of Christ, the way, the truth and the life.⁵⁷³ Religion as the conscience of the nation can be captured under the various images of the role of the conscience. The Church as a vigilant watchman to sound alarm against the forces of evil; the Church in the image of a gadfly awakening people from their moral complacency; the Church in the image of guide giving direction because of her privileged position as custodian of the divine mysteries; the Church in the image of moderation and restraint. As a conscience, it has to avoid the excesses of laxism and intolerance and rigidity in handling the affairs of man. The Church in the image of a formator - here she is a source of enlightenment; the Church in the image of support and encouragement, and in the image of an advocate.⁵⁷⁴ All religion should assume the role of the conscience of the society.

Leadership Role: The priests or religious leaders have leading roles to play in ensuring peace and justice in the nation. First of all, they are citizens before becoming sacred ministers. Even though they now have a special mission they cannot deny that what happens in the state positively or negatively does not affect them. They are not to remain behind the altars keeping silent while things are going bad. They have a role to play. Christ evangelized not only with words but also with actions. He fed the crowd (Mat. 14:14-31), he raised the dead (Jn. 11), he healed the sick (Mk. 7:37). The priest as a prophet rolls the ball in the court of the political leadership. They should denounce bad policies, making their position clear by pointing out the gospel

⁵⁷²Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Uwalaka, 89-90.

⁵⁷⁴ Anthony.

truth.⁵⁷⁵ The priests alongside their members are to collaborate together to transform the society.

Advocacy Role: religion should play an advocacy role for the dependant, less privileged ones of the society. Although the religious leaders may have no say in policy making of the nation, yet they can play an active role in bringing about the vision of human rights. They can play the role of an advocate on behalf of the dependent. Their altars can be employed in airing God's view about the dependent, the poor and less privileged ones of the society. They can serve as God's mouthpiece in a society that has rejected the divine as a source for legislation.⁵⁷⁶

The religious leaders should revisit the perspective about rethinking a new way of doing theology that each religion should rethink their approach to politics. Christians must not live a schizophrenic kind of life, with their feet on earth and their heads in heaven. The Church is made of people. They are the citizens of a political entity called nation or state. Within that entity they are subjects of some defined rights and privileges. The Church cannot but be concerned with her people's welfare. It is also plausible to assert that the formation of religious leaders and priests must be directed towards giving them a firm and extraordinary background to face all the various societal ills, both physical and spiritual. Andrew Esua acknowledges that many priests and religious have done a lot to fight the rights of citizens. Many have lost their lives and are still ready to do the same for the sake of the continuing humanization of people. The battle continuous until the world is transformed into the kingdom of God, though eschatological, however, foretasted in process and in time.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁵ Andrew Esua. "Priests and Religious and a World of Politics", in *The Church as Agent of Progress and Development*, CIP Jubilee Essays. Ed. Izu Onyeocha. (Owerri: Imo State University Press, 2008), 139-141.

⁵⁷⁶Jeffreis M. Hamilton. *Social Justice and Deuteronomy: The Case of Deuteronomy 15*.(Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992), 151.

⁵⁷⁷Esua,147.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is a country that is really well endowed naturally with both human and natural resources. This is a nation that these resources if they are well annexed will launch the nation into global economic giant. The Nigerian leaders are only enriching themselves and their allies at the expense of the masses. They have been very insincere and corrupt. This has led the Nigerian economy to suffer a 'shell-shock' because the infrastructure and institutions (including educational institutions) that spur the economy have been neglected for decades. These unresolved challenges have increased public discontent. Nigeria needs a leader with the commitment and political will to challenge the *status quo* and transform Nigeria into a 'knowledge' society. Development-conscious and 'knowledge' societies are constantly restructuring and updating their political and educational institutions and equipping them with modern technologies. No nation will become a 'knowledge' society without viable educational institutions. The primary goal of education is research and learning to push back the frontier of ignorance.

Poverty and hunger are also serious national problems. Today, the biggest worry for the poor and unemployed Nigerians is not the brightness of their political future but when the ailing economy will become well enough to create employment. Thus the government should focus on providing good economic environment and invest in human development, including health care, education, skills training and acquisition of advance technology. Skills acquisition would enable the poor to learn both soft as well as hard skills with which to find employment and improve their lives. An effective government is therefore at the root of achieving economic growth and development in any society. Nigeria needs a leader who can adopt progressive social policies and values and tame bribery and corruption, nepotism and tribalism and other obstacles to national development.

There is need for capacity building. Nigeria could become an economic power-house and command the attention of the

international community only if it can give proper attention to education and technological development, learn to reward hard work and creativity, and ensure constant power supply and produce high quality goods and services. The people have a critical role to play in meeting the challenges facing the economy; they should become politically educated so as to make the political leaders to listen and act right. However, without good monetary policy and fiscal policy, and without good governance and transparency, the Nigerian economy will continue to shrink with high unemployment, poverty and crime.

If Nigerian leaders will maintain justice, fairness and equity, then the much elusive peace will return to Nigeria. Nigerian leaders should be satisfied with what they receive. They are to shun greed and corruption. Contentment with godliness is a great gain. For Nigeria, the gain will be enormous with the return of peace and serenity; the nation will be on the verge of great economic giant. This will translate to a rapid development of the nation. Sabotaging of essential services will stop altogether. The issue of power that seems to defy solution will receive robust generation. However, if the leaders will refuse to change, the cost may be too high to bear. The leaders must be just, fair to all and treat all with equity. Then, the most elusive peace will reign and the economy will receive a boost and there will be rapid all-round development of the nation.

Closing and Concluding Remark

The unity highlighted in Psalm 133 is akin to that of Ephesians 4:1-3 where Paul writes, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

This is what John Ambra, director of Development for Guidestone Financial Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, recently preached a message at the Precision Valley Baptist Church in

Springfield, Vermont, on Psalm 133. In this message he stated the following:

Unity in the Body (among Nigerian's religious leaders) ...

Reflects God's personhood

Refreshes God's people

Reaches the perishing (and the impoverished)

Releases God's power

Requires our pursuit.⁵⁷⁸

This writer is strongly recommending that there is the need for the country to factor and fashion out a national language. The beauty of the diverse languages that should have enriched our nation is dividing us. It is high time that one common national language should be worked out. The religious leaders should lead in this respect and carry the campaigns to the corridor of those who are in power to work on this. That worked out national language should be adopted and used in the field of education, economic, communication and all areas of our national life.

⁵⁷⁸John Ambra, "Unity in the Body," Sermon Notes, (Psalm 133:1-3) on September 28, 2014 @ Precision Valley Baptist Church in Springfield, Vermont.