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HARNESSING THE ORACLE OF SIMEON (LUKE 2: 25-35): AS A NEXUS FOR PEACFUL CO-EXISTENCE AMONG RELIGIOUS ADHERENTS IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Religion at different times has served both as unifying and divisive medium. One of its potent instruments is persecution which is both inter and intra in nature and outlook. No religious leader at the initial inception however enjoyed any form of immunity from persecution; none also, experienced extinction but instead continued to witness wide followership. This paper examines the potential of harnessing the Oracle of Simeon in the Gospel of Luke as a nexus for promoting peaceful co-existence among adherents of different religions in Kwara State, Nigeria. The prophecy given by Simeon, in which he recognizes Jesus as the Messiah and praises God for allowing him to see the savior before he dies, is analyzed as a message of hope and unity, highlighting the common humanity of all people and the importance of recognizing and respecting diverse beliefs and practices. The writer adopts historical, analytical and exegetical methods. Finding reveals that for the ministry of Jesus to succeed, persecution was a necessity but for an expected end. Hence Jesus' admonition to his disciples, not only to expect persecution but to abstain from any form of violence and retaliation. The paper suggests that this message can be promoted through interfaith dialogue, education and community building initiatives, and through emphasizing the importance of understanding and valuing perspectives and experiences of those who may hold different beliefs.

Keywords: Religion, Persecution, Nexus, Peaceful, Co-existence, Common Humanity, Tolerance.

Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous country in West Africa and vested with religious diversity: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (Zubairu, 258). Religion has been a vital instrument of human association and relationship (Kehinde, 78), it makes strong claims on people's allegiance, and universal religion makes claims on all the people rather than just a particular community (Zubairu, 259). Religion binds people together in common practices and beliefs, it draws them together in common goal of life. This goal may be ''life'' in the most literal sense since religions are the earliest protective systems we know about that enable people to have children and raise them to adulthood. Religion, therefore, bind people together and supply the means through which their lives can be lived with truth and purpose (Bowker, 8). In the same vein religion has constituted a major point of divergence, crises and

misunderstanding; while on the one hand, it has facilitated mutual growth and development between various people groups, families and ethics, it has, on the other hand bred dissentions that are characterized by wanton destruction of lives and properties. This has become more prevalent in pluralistic religious settings, where both superiority and inferiority complexes gravitate toward hatred and gruesome loss of lives. Such has been the experience in Nigeria, a nation of multi ethno-religious and social economic diversity (Kehinde, 78).

Religion has come to occupy a central stage in people's consciousness and academic discourse. Religion is the recognition of all duties as divine commands; the religionist is earnestly devoted and attached to religion (Imaekhai, 27). Religion can be both an integrative and divisive factor in any society. When the divisive elements of religion are not properly handled and brought under strict control, they create tensions and unrest in a society (Anthony, 5). Religion has been mostly used negatively in Nigeria politics since independence (Zubairu, 258), the nation has witnessed scores of religious conflicts and crises as a result of intolerance and total disregard for human rights and reprisal attacks (Kehinde, 98). No wonder, Afolabi opines that, "religion does not make people good or bad; on the contrary, it is being used as an instrument of oppression and deceit in Nigeria (Afolabi, 42). Although three major religions are conspicuously enshrined in the constitution namely Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion, the contest for public space and dominance has often pitched them against one another. Prominent among these are Christianity and Islam, the two monotheistic religions that often trace their origin to the same ancient personalities such as Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, and David. Yet, they maintain certain peculiarities with respect to means, place, time of worship and other doctrines (Kehinde, 98). It must be noted that the impact of such crises and violence is felt on the two adherents of the religions in Nigeria hence the need for messages of hope, healing, and unity ensuring the common humanity of all people and the importance of recognizing and respecting diverse religious beliefs and practice.

Textual Analysis of Luke 2: 21-35

The Gospel according to St. Luke is the "most beautiful book ever written; it would not be far wrong to say that the third gospel is the best life of Christ ever written," (Ayegboyin, 109) and of all the Gospels, it gives us the fullest life-story of Jesus; it is also the only one to have a sequel (Alexander, 595).Luke's Gospel is in many ways the most distinctive of the three Synoptic Gospels, and, since he is the author of the Acts of the Apostles as well, Luke's literary contribution to the New Testament is greater than that of any other writer (more than a quarter of the whole). The Gospel and Acts together constitute a single, two-volume work, the over-riding theme of which is the universality of the Kingdom of God (Stoot, 46). The Holy Spirit has chosen Luke's Gospel to reach all nations with the beautiful story of God's love in Christ (Brand, 1058). Looking on the new born Jesus, Simeon praises God: "for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles…" (Luke 2:30-32). Luke tells the story of the spreading of this light until, two volumes later, his work concludes with Paul's words, "I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" (Acts 28:28) (Stoot, 46).The testimony to Jesus continues as Simeon the prophet reveal God's plan. Simeon's prophecies share a note of hope and expectation, along with declarations that in this child, God's promise is moving into realization; Luke also reveals Jesus' superiority to John in this passage, for the testimony about John stops with his circumcision but the praise of Jesus extends long past the eight day of life.

As Simeon's prophecy mention Jesus' relationship to the Gentiles (for the first time in the book). This passage also provides the first hint that all will not go well. Mary will experience the pain of seeing her son rejected by a divided Israel (Bock, 58-9).

Joseph and Marry are careful that requirements of the law should be carried out; circumcision apparently in Bethlehem and purification for which they have to travel to the Temple at Jerusalem, (Porter, 1190); Mary and Joseph carried out the pronouncement of the angel by naming their son according to the word which had come to her before the Baby's conception (1:31) and to him after the Baby's conception (Matt. 1:18-21). The name Jesus is very fitting for it is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua which means "Yahweh is salvation" (cf. Matt. 1:21). As was the custom, Jesus was circumcised on the eight day (Walvoord and Zuck, 208). It was under the Jewish form that Jesus was to realize the ideal of human existence. The theocracy was the surrounding prepared of God for the development of the son of man (Godet, 135). Jesus' parents are law abiding Jews. They show up at the temple to perform sacrifices associated with the wife's purification after birth (Lev 12:2-4, 6). Such a ceremony occurs forty days after the child's arrival; at the same time the firstborn child is to be set aside to the Lord (Ex 13:2, 12, 16; 34:19; Num. 18:15-16) (Bock, 58). Mary had to go through the purification ceremony, after the birth of a boy child, a woman was considered unclean for forty days (eighty for a girl child). She could work around the home and engage in normal activities, but she could not take part in religious ceremonies. She was religiously, that is, ceremonially unclean. After a woman's forty or eighty days were up, she was to make an offering in the temple (Lev. 12: 1-8). A male child was presented (dedicated) in the temple when the family was close to Jerusalem. Why would Jesus, the son of God, be subjected to the legal observances of the law? He was not a stranger to the covenants of God (circumcision). He had created the covenants Himself. He was not lacking in commitment (the Dedication ceremony). He was God Himself, the one to whom all babies were dedicated, yet He was subjected to all the legal requirements (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible, 970) why? Very simply…

> But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. (Gal 4:4-5). For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Heb. 2:17-18) (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible, 970)

Simeon was a man who walked closely with God. He walked so closely that God was able to use him in a most magnificent way to encourage Joseph and Mary, He was "δίκαιος καὶ εὐλαβὴς" (righteous and devout) with utmost circumspection such men take hold of the duties God has assigned to them. They are conscientious in their planning, aiming always to advance their own and their neighbors' welfare, to the glory of God. The combination "righteous and devout" may well indicate that Simeon conducted himself in such a manner that his behavior both with respect to men (he was righteous) and God (he was devout) was the object of God's approval (Hendriksen, 165). This man "was waiting for the consolation of Israel." The delightful term "consolation of Israel" suggests that his expectation was based on the program enunciated in such passages of Isaiah 40ff. he was looking for the day when Israel's warfare and chastisement would be over, and God would "comfort his people." Nor

was Simeon narrow-mindedly concerned simply for the future of Israel. Basing himself again on Isaiah's predictions (e.g. 42:6; 49:6) he foresaw the time when the light of God's salvation would spread to the very ends of the earth (Luke 2: 31-32) (Gooding, 52-3).To be sure, conditions were bad, very bad, in Israel at the time of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. Think of loss of political independence, cruel King Herod, externalization of religion, legalistic scribes and Pharisees and their many followers, worldly-minded Sadducees, the silence of the voice of prophecy, etc. but in the midst of all this darkness, degradation, and despair there were men who were hopefully looking forward to, and earnestly expecting, "the consolation of Israel" (Hendriksen, 165-6).

Simeon's hope is grounded in the scriptural promises of the "restoration of the kingdom to Israel" (Evans, 45). There were such men…and women too! Already mentioned were Mary and Elizabeth. In a moment (see verses 36-38) Luke is going to add Anna to the list. That this group of devout men and women was considerable appears from the phrase "all those who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38). That these men and women were indeed justified in the hope is clear from prophecy. As an example study the many prophecies of Isaiah in which such blessings as comfort, peace, and Joy are promised, and are associated with the Messianic age (Isa. 7:14; 9:1-7; 11:1-10; 40:1-11; 49:8-13; 51:1-6; 52:13-55:13; 601-3; ch. 61; 66:13). Simeon had been endowed with a very rare and special blessing. In some manner, even now before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit rested abidingly upon him. He was being constantly influenced by that Spirit. The same comforter had revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ (Hendriksen, 165-6).

Promise, fulfillment and God's direction stand behind the prophecy of this old saint. Simeon's remarks are set within a hymn known as the *Nunc Dimittis* from the Latin of the hymn's opening phrase (Bock, 59). The child was God's salvation; he was to be the source of peace for the world. Simeon had "seen and embraced" the Messiah, God's salvation (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible, 972). The salvation not only of Israel, but of the Gentile also-the salvation of the entire world (Psalm 98:2-3; Isaiah 49:6; 52:10) (Hale, 295).The prophecy itself is a statement of mature faith. Simeon can die in peace *as you have promised* and taken by God, his *Sovereign Lord*, because *my eyes have seen your salvation.* They are inseparable. There is joy, even in the face of death, when one has seen the source of life. Simeon's job as a sentinel for Messiah is done. The Lord can take him home. Simeon pictures a faithful servant who is at home in God's purpose and plan, even when his time is up (Bock, 59). God's work is for all people, salvation was not for any one people or nation or group. The messiah had come to save all men. Anyone could now be saved, no matter who he was or what he had done. Prejudice and favoritism were unknown to God. He was not willing that any should perish (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible, 972). For Gentiles he (Jesus) is a revelation, this term refers to his opening up the way of salvation to the nations in a way unknown before his coming. But for Israel, God's people, Jesus is glory-that is, his activity represents the realization of promises made by God and thus shows Israel's special place in his heart (Bock, 59).

The Prediction Concerning the Child and the Mother (Mary) Luke 2:34-35

Simeon shows them what reason they had to rejoice; for he blessed them (v. 34), he pronounced them blessed who had the honour to be related to this child, and were entrusted with the bringing him up. He prayed for them, that God would bless them, and would have

others do so too. They had reason to rejoice, for this child should be, not only a comfort and honour to them, but a public blessing. He is set for the rising again of many in Israel, that is, for the conversion of many to God that are dead and buried in sin, and for the consolation of many in God that are sunk and lost in sorrow and despair. Those whom he is set for the fall of may be the same with those whom he is set for the rising again of. He is set εἰς πτῶσιν καὶ ἀνάστασινfor their fall, in order to their rising again; to humble and abase them, and bring them off from all confidence in themselves, that they may be exalted by relying on Christ; he wounds and then heals, Paul falls, and rises again. He shows them likewise what reason they had to rejoice with trembling, according to the advice given of old, with reference to the Messiah's kingdom, Ps. 2:11. Lest Joseph, and Mary especially, should be lifted up with the abundance of the revelations, here is a thorn in the flesh for them, an allay to their joy; and it is what we sometimes need (Henry, 488).

It is true, Christ shall be a blessing to Israel; but there are those in Israel whom he is set for the fall of, whose corruptions will be provoked, who will be prejudiced and enraged against him, and offended, and whose sin and ruin will be aggravated by the revelation of Jesus Christ; many who will extract poison to themselves out of the balm of Gilead, and split their souls on the Rock of salvation, to whom this precious Foundation-stone will be a stone of stumbling. This refers to that prophecy (Isa. 8:14, 15), He shall be for a sanctuary to some, and yet for a snare to others, 1 Pt. 2:7, 8. Note, as it is pleasant to think how many there are to whom Christ and his gospel are a savour of life unto life, so it is sad to think how many there are to whom it is a savour of death unto death. He is set for a sign, to be admired by some, but by others, by many, spoken against. He had many eyes upon him, during the time of his public ministry, he was a sign, but he had many tongues against him, the contradiction and reproach of sinners, he was continually caviled at and abused; and the effects of this will be that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed (v. 35), that is, upon this occasion, men will show themselves, will discover, and so distinguish, themselves. The secret good affections and dispositions in the minds of some will be revealed by their embracing Christ, and closing with him; the secret corruptions and vicious dispositions of others, that otherwise would never have appeared so bad, will be revealed by their enmity to Christ and their rage against him. Men will be judged of by the thoughts of their hearts, their thoughts concerning Christ; are they for him, or are they for his adversaries? The word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and by it we are discovered to ourselves, and shall be judged hereafter (Henry 488-9).

Mary shall experience in her own heart when the climax of this rejection of her son by Israel shall be reached in his death on the cross. Her pain and grief shall be extreme, like the passing of a "great sword through her soul," indicating the prospect of a terrible calamity (Renn, 950). The term ῥομφαία denotes a great broadsword such as used by the barbarians; it was also compared to the sword of Goliath. It is true, Christ shall be a comfort to his mother; but be not thou too proud of it, for a sword shall pass through thine own soul also. He shall be a suffering Jesus; and, First, "Thou shalt suffer with him, by sympathy, more than any other of his friends, because of the nearness of thy relation, and strength of affection, to him." When he was abused, it was a sword in her bones. When she stood by his cross, and saw him dying, we may well think her inward grief was such that it might truly be said, a sword pierced through her soul, it cut her to the heart. Secondly, Thou shalt suffer for him. Many understand it as a prediction of her martyrdom; and some of the ancients say that it had its accomplishment in

that. Note, In the midst of our greatest delights and advancements in this world, it is good for us to know that bonds and afflictions abide us (Henry, 488-9).

The Implication of the Oracle (Prophecy) κεῖται εἰς πτῶσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν andκαὶ εἰς σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον for Christianity

Harassment and suffering which people and institution inflict upon others for being different in their faith, world view, culture, or race is referred to as Persecution, which, seeks to intimidate, silence, push, or even to kill people (Brand, 1277).Religion like any other institution is a fertile ground for over-zealousness. On two occasions in the earthly ministry of Jesus, his disciples display a Spartan attribute of over-zealousness by resorting to violence in the face of glaring persecution. But Jesus responded to the situations differently perhaps, he knew his mission on earth to reconcile all to God.

Notionally, Luke 2: 34-35 alludes to persecution, denial, harassment and rejection of Christ and his offers of salvation to mankind. Note, that, κεῖται εἰς πτῶσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν πολλῶν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ "this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel." The imagery of this verse comes from Isaiah 8:14-15 and 28:13-16, these Old Testament texts are frequently alluded to in the New Testament (Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6-8; Luke 20:17-18, also at Qumran, 1QH 2:8-10; 14:11). Jesus will divide the nation in two: some will respond and others will oppose. That means thatκαὶ εἰς σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον"he will be a sign that will be spoken against." People will contend against and about Jesus; the road to promised fulfillment is not smooth. To identify with Jesus will bring pain, because many will reject him (Bock, 60). The resistance of the people to Jesus will be so frightful that Mary, His mother, will be overtaken by the deepest sorrows, (Geldenhuys, 120). This rejection explains Simeon's reference to a sword piercing through Mary's soul. She will feel a mother's pain as she watches her son go his own way and suffer rejection, but the sword also reflects the pain anyone who identifies with Jesus feels as the world rejects what Jesus has to offer. Simeon's remarks to Mary is an aside, but an important one, since it shows that identifying with Jesus has painful personal consequences (Bock, 60).

Jesus was persecuted and finally killed by the religious and political establishments of his day (Mark 3:6; Luke 4:29; John 5:16; Acts 3:13-15; 7:52). Persecution, therefore, is an expected reality among the followers of Christ. The persecution of Christ and his rejection by his own people are the pattern for the suffering of believers. Just as tribulation (persecution) was inevitable and expected in the messianic ministry of Jesus, so tribulation (persecution) will be present among his followers. Besides, the tribulations (persecutions, rejection, harassments etc.) of believers are in a sense participation in the suffering of Christ (cf. Col. 1:24; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:10; Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 4:13). The persecutions of believers promote transformation into likeness of Christ (cf. Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:8-12, 16); Persecution (Tribulations) teaches Christ followers to comfort and encourage others in similar situations, enabling those suffering to persevere and persist (cf. 2 Cor. 1:4; 4:10; Col. 1:24; 1 Thess. 1:6) (Brand, 1624).

Kehinde opines that, Persecution and trials should be expected by Christians as part of salvation experience since they are considered as stranger here on earth. The oppositions and rejection that Christians are exposed to have always been continual. Jesus had suffered the same fate (89). Absolute trust in Jesus is a necessity in the face of trials (persecution) because he is the cornerstone. Jesus is the cornerstone of all believers' faith. He is strong enough to

sustain them in whatever situation they find themselves. Christians must equally, maintain their identity amidst trials as kingdom of priests and holy nation. No matter the level of persecution and trials, believers need to always remember who they are in the world. There seems to be an element in religious fanaticism which breeds intolerance and can lead to persecution. Christians should repent of this element in their own history and must be radically committed to the abolition of all persecution (Lonrenzen, 1278).

The Need for Religious Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria

The two religions preaching peace has become a mere statement devoid of honest meaning and commitment (Idowu, 83). Nigeria managed to be free from religious fanaticism for about twenty years after her independence but the menace surfaced in Kano in the early 80s. The first mastermind of the first disturbance is called Muhammadu Marwa, alias Maitatsine. He was a Camerounian from the Kotok ethnic group. By the time he established his 'kingdom' in Kano, the government of the day was unaware or unmindful of it. He occupied a whole quarters in the metropolis and converted the schools and markets in the place to his camps. By December 1980, Maitatsine attacked the city of Kano defying a two week ultimatum by the government of Abubakar Rimi to vacate the place and dismantle his camps. In his attack, 177 had died and whopping sum of 8 million was paid by the government to victims. Maitatsine was killed in the crisis but he left uncountable number of fanatical lieutenants behind. Two years after, Maitatsine's spirit surfaced around Maiduguri, Borno State and in Kaduna in 1982 and the nation lost about 400 lives and property worth about 3 million was destroyed. In 1983 and 1984, fanatics stuck in Gombe, Bauchi and Jimeta in the then Gongola state. These left more than 1,000 people dead. Kano, Kaduna and Katsina had the worst hit in the 80-1990s and Christian worship places were burnt down. Thereafter, the Boko Haram disturbances that rocked places like Bauchi, Yobe, Adamawa, Maiduguruetc, cannot be easily forgotten (Akangbe, 140-5).

In spite of Gowon's post war economic and political programmes of reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation on the administrative canvas, religion was becoming tenuous between Christians and Muslims so much that it was threatening to lead the nation into the brink of bloodshed and collapse (Akangbe, 140). The government has set up series of committees of inquiry on the crisis nationwide and formed different Council on Religious Matters in States and Federal level like the establishment of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) for the purpose of achieving peaceful co-existence among people of different religious backgrounds in Nigeria. It was established on September 1999 to provide religious leaders and traditional rulers with a variable forum to promote greater interaction and understanding among the leadership and their followers as well as lay foundation for sustainable peace and religion harmony in Nigeria (Awokoya, 51). But this monster is still alive, therefore, inter religious harmony and peaceful co-existence is necessary for the following reasons:

1. It would lead to the deeper appreciation of other religions and deepens a participant's commitment to his or her religion. Therefore, religious tolerance would be attained.
2. Careless and provocative utterances would be avoided if inter religious harmony is given a chance.
3. It would promote peace, friendship and discourage violence in the society, thereby, allowing good governance.

4. The harmony of the three religions would uncover areas of differences and how to avoid offending each other.
5. It helps Christianity for example, to produce a theology to account for religious pluralism (Abolarin, 163).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Here we are with a true leadership by example. Jesus was heavily persecuted for religious purposes; His persecution was beyond hatred to series of violence which later culminated into his death and resurrection. Jesus however had the right to retaliate by resenting to and encouraging violence, but he saw beyond the persecution itself and was able to see the powers behind the persecution; the first power in no doubt that of God, as enumerated in the Oracle (prophecy) of Simeon, it is a must for Jesus to go through such challenges because God had destined it so. The other power behind the persecution could be Satan; Luke 22:3 attributes Judas Iscariot's role in the persecution of Jesus to Satan. It is therefore not impossible that those who persecuted Jesus were gilded by the devil. Although God made the persecution of Jesus imperative, it was not imperative for anyone to participate, it was indeed a matter of choice. That notwithstanding, these agents of the persecution were hand formerly reward just like Jesus said, "those who carry sword will die by the sword" this however, is beyond the jurisdiction of the persecuted but God who judges righteously. The simple reason why vengeance is not meant for religious adherents is that no one can defend God.

Christians continue to attempt to discern the relation of peace and justice. From Psalms 85:10 and James 3:18 we learn that there is no peace without justice and no justice without peace. As peace should not be kept at any price, so justice should not be achieved by any means. Peacemaking is intimately related to setting at liberty those who are oppressed. The good news is for those who have been sinned against as well as for all who have sinned (Atkinson and Field, 655) Justice, simply put means giving to every person what is due to him/her. It connotes liberty, freedom, equality and fair play; it implies also that we must endeavor to defend innocence and to promote justice and truth among mankind; it lays background for understanding, appreciating and actualizing human rights in society. It connotes equality of all persons irrespective of race, color, sex, language, religion, opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (Ayantayo, 80).

Islam also recommends application of justice in man to man relationship. Allah commands justice and fairness (Surah 10:90). It adds "we surely sent our messages with clear proofs and reveled with them books and standard, so that people may deal with justice (Surah 57:25)… let not the hatred of others make you do the wrong and depart from justice. Justice is considered next to piety (Surah 5:8)." The Islamic concept of justice is demonstrated in recognition of the rights of individuals, such as child, woman, man, husband, wife, the needy, parents and children. The same also echoes in the Islamic concepts of political and economic obligations for the state and citizen (Surah 4:58; 4:135, 5:8). Christianity view justice as the basis for cordial social relations be it in business, economy, politics and religion. Justice is demonstrated by the impartiality of God as evident in Job 34:18-19; Matt. 5:45; Acts 10:34-35;, and Rom. 10:12. For this reason, justice is recommended for Christians, as can be seen in Deut. 16:20; Ps. 82:3; Prov.21:3; Isaiah 56; Rom. 13: 7; Col. 4:5. These explain why Bible condemns any act that could water down justice, such as oppression of the poor, trampling upon the right of the poor and the less privileged. Hence, it recommends justice, because God loves it

(Psalm 33:5). Amos 5:24 "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" Prophet Amos condemned every act of injustice in his time in this context. This particular verse suggests practical and continuous manifestation of justice in all spheres of life without an exception. To the best of our knowledge, articulation of justice in the Nigeria socio-political terrain is important now that the country is in search of National Unity (Ayantayo, 81-2).

It is one thing to have various injunctions in the Christian and Islamic scriptures regarding justice, it is another thing seeing them being practiced. Therefore, in Islam, Muslims are expected to tolerate one another including non-Muslims and their religions (Surah 41:34-35) tolerance is expressed in meeting an evil deed with a good one. In religious setting, Islam speaks of religious tolerance, which presupposes toleration of other faiths. This is expressed in Surah 2:256 "Let there be no compulsion in religion," the Quranic injunction is that compulsion is incompatible with religion because religion depends upon faith and freewill, and these would be meaningless, if imposed (Surah 109:1-6). In the light of this, Islam recommends avoidance of vulgar language (Surah 6:108); tolerable mode of greetings (Surah 19:46-47; 25:63; 28:55; 43:88-89); invitation of mates or colleagues to discussion (Surah 3:64), and what to do in case of deadlock (Surah 5:3). Likewise, in Christianity, tolerance is recommended as a factor enhancing cordial, human and social relation. It is anchored on the concept of live and let live, in which both the rich and the poor are entitled to co-exist. For example, religious tolerance is implicitly recommended in Luke 9:49, 50 and Mark 9: 38-39. However, Christians are instructed not to tolerate wrong, which could be tantamount to compromise (Ayantayo, 79-80). Therefore; the need for Religious Co-existence among the adherents cannot be over emphasized. The writers recommend the following ways to handle Inter-Religious Intolerance in Nigeria:

1. The truth of each religion may be preached by their respective propagators without a compromise that can lead to syncretism, complacency and apostasy. In this regard, an ideal perspective in the current debate on inter-religious harmony in Nigeria should be for such religion to teach their truths absolutely but should be disciplined and understanding enough to allow for the freedom of adherents of other religions to propagate in the same way without clashes or questioning.
2. Unification theology which teaches that all religions are essentially the same and should be concretized is equally unhelpful in this regard. The road towards religious peace and harmony is therefore basically sociological rather than religious or spiritual. It is dependent on Nigerian's recognizing the equal rights of fellow Nigerians in the society as stipulated by the constitution.
3. In both the Muslim and Christian tradition, there exist deep spiritual heritages. Dialogue can exist at this level. Muslims and Christians can share their religious and mystical experiences with each other. Muslims can learn from Christians as well as Christians learning from Muslims. This will help to clarify the false positions held by both Nigerian Muslims and Christians: the Muslims in Nigeria would say Christians bow and worship images; and Christians accuse the Muslims of bowing and worshipping a stone. The proposal of the researchers is that, both Muslims and Christians Should be open to receive each other in their place of worship.
4. A loving spiritual approach should also be adopted. Divine love is uncaused and unselfish. Love between people of different religions could prohibit their antagonizing or hurting each other. Rather they could be challenged to cooperate for the collective

good of all. This free spirit would not give room for unhealthy competition and rivalry of religions for dominance over the others. It is noteworthy however that this ideal may appear utopian and may not be taken for granted especially in contemporary Nigeria where the inter-religious gap is widening with time (Olagunju, 132-3).

5. Religion can boost inter-religious dialogue which can ultimately bring about religious tolerance in the society. Inter-religious dialogue is a platform where religious leaders discuss and orientate people about the essence of religion and its efficacy in the society. Hence, it is important for religious leaders to guide against hypocritical teaching that can disrupt peace and political stability. Therefore, exchange of ideas removes ignorance and eliminates religious conflicts. Also, the observance of the oath of office by the political leaders will sustain political development. Political office holders should allow their religious tenets to guide them continuously (Afolabi, 47).
6. The only way religion can have a positive influence on governance is through the inculcation of a high sense of morality, honesty, sense of duty, selfless service, public accountability, respect for human lives, love of one's neighbor, sense of humanity, abhorrence of violence, love for peace, contentment with what one can legitimately have, corruption, justice etc. in the citizens as well as the leaders (Omoregbe, 309). If a religion fails to inculcate a sense of morality in the people, then it has failed in its creed and is not in a position to help bring about good governance and sustenance of political development in the country.
7. The government should give more power to the National Religious Advisory Board and the Nigeria Inter-religious Council in promoting inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance through organizing seminars and workshops for religious adherents which will help in building sustainable political development. Haynes argues that when interfaith dialogue is skillfully organized and pursued, it can encourage those who have personally involved in conflict to work together towards peace accommodation (68).

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