

# THE TASK OF CHRISTIAN CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND THE NEW CHALLENGES OF ETHNICITY IN WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION.

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## ABSTRACT

Nigeria's typicality includes the fact that Nigerians are more instinctually moved by the forces of ethnicity. Nigeria is a country of surplus ethnic groups. Ethnicity had brought out the best and the worst of Nigeria in human terms. Ethnicity has continually played relevant roles virtually across all economic, social, political, and religious spheres of the nation. But not withstanding the positive contribution of ethnicity, the political and social map of Nigeria had been traced by regicide and primary violence caused by ethnicism. The negative influence of ethnicity is increasing especially in social, economic, religious and political sectors of the nation. As we all know it, ethnicism is a serious national threat challenge, since the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 and the first independence of the country in 1960. Ethnic divisions within the country has turned Nigeria into an ethnic bloodbath and anti-social tendencies. Ethnicism is an affront on human person, and a negation of vocation of Christian Church leadership to build here on earth a Kingdom of truth, justice and neighbourliness. As part of efforts to boost commitment in halting and reversing impact of ethnicism in the country, the article aimed at introducing strategies that would promote Christian Church leadership as an important organ for the overcoming the challenges of ethnicity. A Christian Church leadership is imperative in introducing strategies through effective leadership in individuals, government and private to take initiative to find innovative solutions to the challenge of ethnicity in a culturally manner.

**KEY WORDS:** CC = Church Leadership, CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church, CIC = Codex Iuris Canonici (Code of Canon Law), CL = Christian Leadership, ET = Ethnicism.

## INTRODUCTION

The fundamental idea of this article is that Christian Church leadership must come of age to face the challenges of ethnicity in West African sub-region. There are ostensibly today the challenges of reconstruction, restoration and reconstitution posed by ethnicity for Christian Church leadership in West African sub-region. The argument of the essay is that a creative leadership is a path which will lead us out of the scourges of division, discrimination and disintegration into re-constructive, restorative and re-constitutive society. The article explores the creative force of Christian leadership in the context of service. The focus is the Nigerian context, while particular emphasis falls upon the phenomenon of ethnicity in the entire West African Sub-region. While a few have devised means of tackling such challenges, some are yet to fashion out new solutions to the problems, for me the challenge in this essay is to address five issues:

- (1) What is the state of the question?
- (2) Who is a Christian leader?
- (3) What are the challenges of ethnicity?
- (4) What is the relationship between ethnicity and Christian leadership?
- (5) Which way leads to the future?

## THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

There is *tension* in the relationship of the past and to the present, born of an understanding of that relationship which was common to all the multi-ethnic

groups of West African countries. It is a common knowledge in the history of most of the countries in West African Sub-region that at various times different ethnic groups have engaged in civil wars which lead to the close down of national boundaries and decapitation of economic, social and political relationship between people and tribes. The *constraints* of history are basically the constraints of context, "every age poses new challenges and new temptations for the People of God on their pilgrimage, and our own is no exception" (John Paul II, 1988, p.12). At the moment, ethnicity is ravaging the fabrics of the Sub-Saharan African continent, in a higher frequency. It is a specific scourge on the faces of many countries in West African sub-region in their autochthonous and rural African setting. Sadly, this scourge does not give any room for its victims to take stock of the collateral damages and injuries inflicted on their images.

Ethnicity carries a great dose of *ambivalence*. The sociological recognition of ethnicity has both good and bad effects. In the thinking of some members of the public, ethnicity shapes society, religion, culture, economics and politics. Ethnicity maintains an unchallenged claim to bring people to a close relationship. In that relationship we learn the sense of community, solidarity, interdependence and inter-relationship. Many people welcome the positive effects of ethnicity, they see it as an important organ to hold together the citadel of life in a creative tension. Many people, who are pessimistic doubt its feasibility in an environment where people of different ethnic groups

cannot co-existence peacefully without unavoidable internal crisis and diverse external conflicts.

Moreover, there is a *dialectic* between ethnicity and Christian Church leadership. A Christian leader faces great difficulties, temptations and tensions, as well as wide ranging opportunities and valuable insights in a state with multi-ethnic embroidery. The dialectic between ethnicity and Church leadership is decisive, an epochal new situation has emerged and a new challenge of the first order confronts Christianity in West Africa. The geographical and social expansion of Christianity into the West African sub-region confronted the Church leadership with new tasks in doctrine, life and organization of the region. The most veritable task facing the Christian Church leadership today is the task of transforming the multi-ethnic states of West African sub-region into a united region composed from the multiplicity of people and nations.

### THE CALL TO CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

**Origin of the Name Christian:** The name Christian first emerged in the context of the Acts of the Apostles 11:26. It is within this milieu that the group which assembled around the apostles to proclaim Christ's event was generally referred to as the *brethren*. Only the apostles could claim to have known, seen, touched and experienced Jesus personally. Other disciples came to experience Jesus through the preaching of the apostles, and on conversion they automatically became the preachers of the same Christ. The apostle to the Gentiles, St. Paul is a shining example of this experience. Standing on this precinct, we can say that Christians are essentially those who experience Jesus and accept Him as Messiah. One is a Christian because it has been given to one to be such: *Simon son of Jonah you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.* This is the statement of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. At the very inception of the Gospel of John, we witness that those who believe in Jesus' Name are those "who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God Himself" (Jn 1:13). This implies that being a Christian is the gift of God's grace.

By definition a Christian is someone whose name is publicly linked to the Name of Jesus Christ through the Christian initiation of baptism, and who follows the route of discipleship of Jesus Christ. This understanding focuses Jesus Christ as the 'Way and Experience for a Christian. As we all can testify, Jesus' call to discipleship include a degree of metamorphosis of family and ethnic ties, this is vividly portrayed by the question, *who are my mother and my brothers?...whoever does the will of God...* (Mk 3:31-35). The readiness to follow the path of Jesus implies an undergoing of a cultural transformation of the ties of family descent and ethnic particularities (Matt 8:21-22, and Luke 9:59-60). Being a disciple of Christ transcends all ethnic groups (Matt 10:37; Lk 14:26), and ethnic preferences (Stephen Barton, 1994, p.70).

Historically, the Christian religion is based on

the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Its doctrines, dogmas and beliefs stress this life, and the life to come (here and hereafter, yet and not yet), defining the life of

heaven in contrast to the life of earth. Admittedly, Christianity had a special link with Judaism, the ethnic religion of the Hebrew nation. The Christian Church began in Jewish environment, and later separated itself from the Jewish milieu, and religious context. Substantially, the Christian Church acknowledged the Scriptures as inspired by God, and the Christians have appropriated for themselves the promise of the ancient Israel. Christian thoughts and ideals took a real change of direction independently of all its traces of Judaic origin. According to Christian thoughts, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, and the option of membership of Christian religion is universally open for every human being, independently of race, tribe, colour, gender, or ethnicity thereby disengaging the Christian religion from all ethnic ties, and geographical restrictions of place, people or nation. Christianity is universally present in every land and nation, and yet it transcends every geographical landscape and ethnic boundaries. Christianity cannot be totally identified with Judaism because of its universal extension through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit breathes where He wills, and He transcends all ethnic boundaries. The mission of Jesus and the mission of the Spirit coalesced in the mission of the apostles and their successors. The mission of the apostles and their successors is to proclaim the Gospel to "the whole world" (Mk 16:15).

Virtually in this context, Christianity is a religion founded on the life, teaching, and examples of Jesus Christ, as derived from the principles of "the Synoptic Gospels" (Claude Monteiro, 1990, p.9), and Christian leadership can be described as the process of discipleship of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit and in communion with the Christian community, the Church. In the process, "the Spirit inhabits the person of the believer and acts on him" (Francois-Xavier Durrwell, 1998, p.197). The moving accounts of the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles continuously illustrate that the mantle of leadership fell on those whose lives bore the imprint of the animation of the Holy Spirit. According to John Perry, when we turn through the pages of the Bible, we encounter many examples of men and women, entrusted with the mantle of leadership, being prepared and energized by the vitality of the Spirit of God: their insufficiency matched with the sufficiency of God, their inefficiency balanced with His efficiency, their ineffectiveness corresponds with His effectiveness, their inadequacy synchronized with His adequacy, their powerlessness coalesced with His powerfulness, their weakness sustained by His strength. In their weakness, they were made strong by the limitless resources of God (John Perry, 199, p.11).

**The Call to Christian Church Leadership:** The vocation of a Christian leader is a call to Christ-centered leadership. Taking biblical pattern as his blueprint, John Perry says that "the Christian leader is

an under-shepherd, submitting to the authority of Jesus Christ the Chief Shepherd" (John Perry, 1999, p.17). The moral imperative to live as Jesus did has a great implication for Christian leaders. Jesus taught and acted with authority, due to the experience which

He had of the Father and of the Spirit; this authority set Him apart from other religious teachers and leaders.

The role of Christian leaders in the society is a vocation, a calling, a task or responsibility, for which God has equipped them through their share in the Prophetic mission of Christ in the world. The task permeates every dimension of human life: family, education, economic, social, political, religious and spiritual life of the people "a religion which is not related positively to the total developing life of the community will never do ...but neither will a social Gospel busily engaged in a programme of improvement which leaves the deep personal levels of human nature untransformed"(J.V.Taylor, 1975, p.20). Christian leaders are to remain steadfast in the values of the Gospel, which emphasized service, steadfastness and sincerity of purpose.

Ethnicity defines the contemporary Nigerian society, in which a Christian leader is called to labour for the spreading of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. When the people of Nigeria were converted to the Christian religion, the Gospel was planted in many ethnic cultures (soils) of the land. This was variety of ethnic cultures and people which later evolved into a nominal nation that we know today as one Nigeria in many varieties of ethnicity. The people of Nigeria are configured by ethnicity and consumed with ethnic interests, rather than national interests. When an ethnic group gain political power, they often use that power to their own advantage in quite *unchristian manner*. The ethnic group (soil) in which they were brought up influence them in their daily living, more than the standards of the teaching of Jesus Christ. There are many tenets of ethnicity which are radically opposed to the principles of the Christian Gospel of salvation. In our present perspective, there is ethnic cleansing in some parts of Nigeria; ethnic marginalization of particular ethnic groups in making political appointments, and ethnic discrimination of many ethnic minorities in the distributions of the natural resources. Nigeria lives and exists in a variety of tensions, tensions which arise from the reality of ethnicity.

The Christian Church leadership is called to carry out a special mission in eradicating the scourges of ethnicism on humanity. In order to do so, a Christian leader must move from organized stagnation of ethnicity to cross culturation of the Church. The Christian Church grew out of the religious experience that the disciples had of their Master, Jesus and they were welded into fellowship forged through sharing in Jesus' experience and His mission (David Regan, 1994, p.40). Every Christian possesses a dynamism directed towards this mission. As it unfolds itself in history, this mission embraces all of time, past, present and future, and follows the cultures of an age so as to speak to every age more clearly the experience of

Jesus. Culture is an integral part of ethnic identity of a people, affirming this identity and legitimizing it.

## THE CHALLENGES OF ETHNICITY IN WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION

Before the advent of Christianity in the West African sub-region, structures of leadership existed in various forms in what the European nations referred to as the Dark Continent. In most cases, the chief of an ethnic group was also the chief priest during the religious sacrifice and ceremonies. Leadership in these traditional societies was a sacred function. The coming of Christianity and Western education did not imply the total elimination of the functions and traditional systems of leadership in West African sub-region. Even with the presence of Christianity and education and the strong influence of European customs, traditional African ways of life and religious practices are very evident as one travels from one region to the other – East African region, North African region, West African region, Central African region or South African region.

In the West Africa sub-region, prior to the European colonization, and the final partition of the African continent in the nineteenth century, and the creation of the present modern states of Africa, there existed in Nigeria several small, independent kingdoms with well-established local rulers. Each grouping had its political setup with respected chiefs, counsellors, and family heads. Each ethnic group encountered one another through trade, or commerce, or inter tribal wars, *neither through* bloody coups d'etat, nor through educational institutions, economic sectors, national budget, intermarriages, national assembly, political parties, or democratic system of government with an elected president as head of state. Colonization and Christian education tore our traditional structures of leadership into pieces and brought these close-ethnic groups together in a unifying tension.

Ethnicity placed a formidable role on Christian education of the earliest Christian leaders in Nigerian society. The dialectic of Christian education in Nigeria was rooted in a long history that reached a level of intensity reminiscent of internal ethnic struggles of a century ago. Remarkably, "between 1850 and 1930, a period of eighty years, the Yoruba ethnic group of the coastland areas sent their children abroad, particularly to the universities in Great Britain and Ireland. Yoruba doctors, lawyers, churchmen, teachers, engineers, architects, surveyors, and magistrates dominated the Nigeria scene during this period. By the turn of the twentieth century other ethnic group began to follow the Yoruba example. Of particular significance were the Ibibio efforts in the late 1930s. The Ibibio example was later copied by the Igbo ethnic group who in turn sponsored a number of students for overseas studies. Thus the year 1930-50 witnessed intensive competition and struggle for higher education by individuals and diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria, especially in the South" (A.Babs Fafunwa, 1974 p.140).

Within a period of about hundred years, we can perceive the rather startling effects of changes initiated by Christian education. There were large percentages of relatively well-educated Christians living in almost every part of Nigeria far away from their ethnic surroundings. It was clear that these well-educated men and women provided a more focused leadership in the country. The results portray a generation whose attitudes and values stressed authenticity, sensitivity, openness, solidarity and shared experience.

In the space of a decade later, a focused educated men and women within the ethnic groups of Nigeria had come to full circle in leadership position at the time of independent in 1960. Before the pre-Christian education system in Nigeria or the pre-colonial rule, authority and leadership were pyramidically pattern in structures and authorities vested in the Oba, Alafin, Eze or an Emir in isolation from the people of other ethnic groups both in theory and practice. Since in our times, the Christians have an over more active share in the leadership of the whole Nigerian society, and their roles cutting across all ethnic groups. They participate more widely in the various fields of the Church's Apostolate and social development of the country. This situation heightened reliance on Christian leadership, rather than on traditional leadership (of Amanyanabo, Alafin, Eze, Emirs or Obas) and created tensions, especially in situation where some ethnic groups cannot produce their sons and daughters to fill the positions of leadership in their respective areas, and where they have no people in the government, or political and social movements. Unfortunately, Christian education has never fully occurred *evenly* among different ethnic people of Nigeria, and its isolation in the pockets of few ethnic groups resulted in ethnic rivalries and conflicts in the Nigerian society today.

Ethnicism is a social challenge. Sociologically, ethnicity has a social aspect because the nature of a human person and his/her call is social. To say that Nigeria is the most populous black country in the world is an obvious fact, and to say that Nigeria is the giant of Africa is an incontestable statement, but "ethnicity, marginalisation, and tribalism have been destroying our giant's fabric right from the outset. Polarization of our nation by our self-centred and pocket conscious leaders has no doubt given birth to ethnic movements which have been championing the course of their kinsmen" (Ayodele Aluko, 2003, p.12). Nigeria is a center-stage of ethnicity, a network of all religions, a labyrinth of traumatic tribalism, an embodiment of marginalization, and a reflection of greedy and incompetent tribalistic leaders.

In the context of social climate of ethnicity, there are some tasks which some energized leaders can carry out but are simply abandoned or neglected when other members of ethnic groups are involved, because of the leader's sheer allegiance to his ethnic group or his sheer allergy and hatred to a particular ethnic stock. Within the realm of Nigerian society, ethnicity defines the manner of sharing civil and political appointments in the government, determines the

means of occupying a place of honour and power in the society, and the way of distributing social and economic resources in the country. Ethnicism has been the source of widespread practice of social injustice in Nigeria today.

In Nigerian context, ethnicity is a major factor in government and politics. The political situation in Nigeria presents an image of a nation where one ethnic group lionized the principal offices in the State and monopolized the leadership of the country, and reduced other ethnic groups as on-lookers in the drama. Leadership in Nigerian context, whether it is religious or civil leadership is completely puzzled with

the reality of ethnicism. It is noteworthy to mention that in societies like Africa where "mechanical solidarity" (Emile Durkheim, 1964, p.58) is in vogue, ethnicity determines the principle of ascription rather than achievement. It often determines matters related to appointment to important positions in Church and State, quite unlike in industrialized societies of Europe and America, where matters of birth and place of origin are not what often determine progress and appointments, but rather measurements of merit and hard work. The problem is compounded by the fact that different ethnic groups must compulsorily live together, work together, share life and common destiny together. Everywhere in Nigeria (both in Church and society) there is deep-seated hatred, long-aged conflicts, inextinguishable fire of violence, and unquenching thirst for bloodbath resulting from artificial incompatibility of different ethnic groups.

Ethnicity constitutes great challenges to Christian leadership in Nigeria. Ethnicity is challenging, and to some extent threatening. We are aware of the sharp criticism and fierce opposition, which are being triggered off by decisions of leaders in favour of one ethnic group at the expense of the others. We are all aware of the tendency of the modern Nigerians to interpret leadership as a matter of profit and loss from ethnic point of view, especially from the perspective of what achievements and gains a leader can attract to his or her ethnic groups at the detriment of other groups. According to Asouzu, "one can then understand why our present situation is overcharged with intolerance and self-centeredness such that the success of leadership is measured by the ability of a leader to serve his private interest, the interest of his family, his clan, his state, his political party, his local government, some committee of friends etc. Not even well meaning individuals who want to make a difference are immune to these developments. This is mostly the case in view of the divisive, ethnic and clannish parochial political slogans that are vibrating over the horizon, which really find admiration and fellowship" (Innocent Asouzu, 2003, p.104). There is a lust for power, and political leadership primarily seen in the rivalries between the ethnic groups. Politically speaking, the Republic of Nigeria cannot pride herself on being one of the most peaceful and developed countries on the continent of Africa. The country and its people have an infinite array of needs, and leadership must address these needs relevantly, but to

do so it must see its environment first as *service* and not simply as arena of personal interest.

### THE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IN THE SERVICE OF ETHNICITY

The nature of Christian leadership in the Church and society needs to be given a clearer explanation. Christian leadership as theologically understood rests on the authority exercised by a follower of Christ. The authority attached to the Christian leadership can be exercised as a religious (*ecclesial*) or civil authority. Applied to the Church, Christian leadership involved a kind of *service* rendered to an ecclesial community. For instance, "the fact that one is a bishop is a service which one must render to a broader community" (James O'Halloran, 1984, p.50). The Christian leadership is shared in various ways both by the ministers of the Church (popes, bishops, priests, deacons, catechists, financial officers in the Church etc) and the faithful (national presidents, political governors, senators, legislators, doctors, nurses, lawyers, traders, etc).

Christian leadership is a specific vocation, which is different from other leadership generated by other religions, and human institutions, but in relation to other vocations in the world it is necessary for the preservation of public peace, and fostering of good order and true justice where people must necessarily co-exist. The foundation of Christian leadership rests on the lifestyle of Jesus, on Jesus who calls us to the life of service. Our life as Christian leaders shows little resemblance to the one who loved us and gave His life for service. It is therefore, pertinent to recapture the substance of Christian leadership that will go a long way toward revitalizing the Christological dimension of service.

Christian leadership is a call to serve the entire creation. Human beings as moral agents are chosen to serve creation. Humanity has been created for the purpose of serving God and therefore their vocation on earth is theocentric. Human beings as image of God and moral agents are chosen to serve creation. The place of human beings in God's creation assigned them the role of exercising leadership over the whole creation. While properly exercising kingship over creation (Gen 1:26-27; Psalm 8) human beings as creatures of God exercise too leadership over their fellow creatures. This comes from the fact that human beings are created in the image of God, and therefore are the highest forms of God's earthly creation. From the *imago Dei* flows the teaching on the stewardship of creation, and consequently the Christian leadership. All Christians are called to accept leadership as an exceptional gift of God and a road-map to service. This diaconial experience teaches us that Christian leadership is a service. Christian leadership does not involve status-seeking positions or rank of power and authority, instead it is rooted in *diakonia* (1 Cor 12:4-6) service.

The concept of Christian leadership as it relates to ethnicity comes from our common concern for the

social, and physical needs of people of different ethnic groups and different societies, and to other serious engagements that are related to our life situation. Christian leadership is a mechanical tool to improve social order, and a program for community betterment. Ethnicity is a social factor that forms the mind and identity of individuals, groups, or communities. In its fullest context, ethnicity is a prodigious factor of integration into the social group and of perpetuation of one's cultural values and identity. It is unfortunate that theological reflections and the social climate in most of the African countries have not yet offered an adequate hermeneutics of the social reality of ethnicity in the sub-Saharan continent. Ethnicity is a social reality. It is high time we caught up with this reality. The reality of ethnicity is crucial if one is serious in talking about the specific calling of Christians as well as special tasks assigned to Christian leaders.

Theologically observed, the call to Christian leadership is essentially a call to radical service that transcends one's ethnic bonds and family interests and clan structures. Christian leadership ought to result in a change in life that makes a person increasingly like Christ. Yes, the way many Nigerians (both Christians and non-Christians) approach leadership tends to depend more upon them personally and their concerns for their families, ethnic groups, and family interests rather than upon the objective issues of the wider communities. In the process one discovers a theological problem associated with a leadership which is exercised in isolation from service of the community and which lacked specific content about Christ.

Ethnicism has affected the priorities and general attitudes of leaders in positions of responsibility in the Church or Society. As related to the Church, it is true in Nigerian context that ethnicity has the effect of breaking the bonds, which unite the faithful to Christ and the Church. Ethnicity lowers the life of faith, hope and love in a Christian community. The Christian life consists in following Christ, which is perceived in terms of living out the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. The challenge of all the baptized is to bear witness to their faith with collaboration in such a manner so as to awake hope to the people through the cultures of our time. The Christian must view ethnicity in the context of charity/love. It is a challenge to make our contemporary society better understood and it consists in evangelization of the world of cultures. The mission of a Christian leader is to impress on the Christians that they have mutual vocation and common interests which they must protect and must not neglect. Since we form the Body of Christ and severally members of His Church (1 Cor 12:27). As directed to the Society, There is today a popular conception of leadership as a commodity and transaction, a notion which sharply contrasts with the Christological perspective of leadership as a service. The temptation today is that many see their positions or offices of leadership as a channel through which they can easily come to the bay of their personal interest, the interests of their families, and their ethnic groups. This is mostly the situation in diverse, and



multi-ethnic nationalities of Nigeria at the moment, an ugly attitude which has penetrated deeply into the marrow of our Christian and civil leaders today. Some of our Christian leaders serving in most of ecclesiastical institutions and in public organization go to the extent of limiting the extent and number of individuals, people, ethnic groups or communities which will benefit from their leadership positions.

Experience has shown the value of Christian leadership to the development of the Church and Society – its promotion of the common good and the protection of human rights. There is a need for a more positive attitude towards the promotion of common good, "those entrusted with the resources of the nation must, in the spirit of the Rule of Law, husband and administer those resources (entrusted to their care) with honesty and transparency for the common good of all the citizens, without any unjustifiable discrimination" (N.S.S.Iwe, 2003, p.37) or favour. What is relevant for a man or woman coming to the office of Christian leadership whether in the Church or State is reflected by the language of philosophers. The two Greek ancient philosophers, Plato and Aristotle discussed leadership very extensively, and they came out with the conclusion that the two basic qualities of a good leadership (whether Christian leadership, Moslem leadership, religious leadership, political leadership or leadership of any type) are the concern for the common good of the people, and happiness of human beings in the society.

Aristotle characterized authentic leadership "as one producing or preserving the common interest of all" (T.A.Sinclair, 1983, p.22) and "any government which actually fulfills this end to the satisfaction of human expectation is good, any which does not, but governs for the benefit of a few at the expense of the many, is not good" (T.A.Sinclair, 1983, p.10). Aristotle's idea about leadership forms the bed-rock for Christian leadership, especially for a Christian leader who governs a state with many ethnic groups, religions, and different levels of social and economic developments. A good governance must be sustainable, demands must be supplied for whatever is due to each ethnic group. In a state with many different ethnic personalities, a Christian leader should see himself/herself as one in a unique position of joining different ethnic groups together in forming a united government, and in providing a rotation of power among them. A Christian leader should realize that his/her contribution towards uniting the numerous ethnic groups in the state into a people of one social body is an onerous task and constitutes an enormous challenge. If ethnic communities, however small, are given strong, sensitive and visionary leadership, a clear sense of purpose is obvious, and if the epochal human progress is to have a genuine human face, then it must struggle to provide and preserve humanity not only with a means of obtaining the material necessities of life, but also with opportunity of human self-realization in the *service of creation*.

## THE WAY FORWARD

**The Task of Cultural Revival:** The Christian religion is a call to action, a call to assume an ethical and social responsibility for the future of the whole human family. Moreover, Christians are called to life by the creative and redemptive actions of God in the world and are carried along by His Spirit of Christ. The Christians who are involved in leadership both in the Church and State know Christ and they are the products of our society. The challenge of ethnicity in Nigeria takes a fresh new look in the society from a number of theoretical and empirical dimensions: (a) socio-economic aspect (b) socio-political aspect (c) socio-cultural aspect.

In the first place, ethnicity is tied up to the string of our national economy. The majority of Nigerians are languishing in economic conflict today due to shadows of ethnic prosperity. For instance, the issue of resource control in Nigeria has been a constant source of conflicts in the country. Some ethnic areas where mineral gas and oil are found in great commercial quantity in the country felt being exploited by the majority groups. The minority groups claimed that they are suffering exploitation and injustice from the other major ethnic groups in the country. They complained that their natural God-given rights are being denied and they demanded that the Federal Government of Nigeria should give them the right to control and enjoy their natural and God-given resources. They argued that if the mineral gas and oil are found in the North or in the large quantity in the West, the story today would have taken a different turn. These stalwart ethnic groups would come out with a different manner of regulation. When cocoa and groundnut were Nigeria's economic backbones, it was convenient to allow the respective three giant ethnic groups – Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic nationalities a 100 percent control of their natural resources. In this connection, many Christian leaders coming from these minority areas are aware of the fact that the Federal Government is not willing to change its stand or policy on the issue of resource control. Is that not a bold challenge for Christian leaders living in these ethnic zones realizing how necessary unity is for us Nigerians?

In the second place, only through context specific understandings of significance and salience of ethnicity, will it be possible to develop political systems which accommodate or contain ethnicity effectively, whilst minimizing its aggressive effects in the society. The role of Christian leaders in Nigerian society also tasks them on their relationship between ethnicity and politics. There is a great danger facing our dear country Nigeria today, because of the style of leadership, attitude, and character of leaders in power at the various tiers of the government. Many politicians in the country regard politics as business investments of their ethnic groups, rather than vehicle for public services and improvement of human development. The greatest problem militating against human development and security in Nigerian society today is the absence or lack of committed leadership in the

country. If Nigeria were to take its rightful place in the world, the leaders of the country must be ready to effect a positive change in our cultural attitude.

The task of Christian leaders in our context is the responsibility of effecting a positive change in our cultural attitude. Politics or political leadership based on Christian principles could change or transform the culture of a people, because leadership is a major factor that affect people in the way they behave or act. A nation which possesses a right culture will make a right progress. A country that has good political leaders can have a change or transformation of cultures, and change the society for better. This demands a certain commonality of transformation within the pluriformity of cultures in the Nigerian society. Many anthropologists agree that culture is one of the most basic aspects of ethnicity. Most of them feel that language is only second in importance to culture in determining the factors of ethnicity. Where a culture is well directed to the human development, it has generally proven to be a very enriching experience.

In the third place, culture is an adopted human response to the environment by a group of people or individuals who belong to the same environment and share the same way of life. The human response may be in the form of physical, rational or spiritual dynamism. According to Robert Schreiter, "culture is a way of life for a given time and place, replete with values, symbols and meanings reaching out with hopes and dreams often struggling with values for a better world" (Robert Schreiter, 1985, p.21). Culture, as a product of "human activity expresses what humanity can create and simultaneously be created by. Man the author of culture becomes a synonym for man capable of transforming this world and bringing about a better future" (Lucien Richard, 1987, p.94). Culture is the by-product of human interaction with its environment and fellow human beings.

In this connection, ethnicity has to do with human cultures. Culture is at the core of ethnicity. Ethnicity stresses the sense of belonging and identification with a particular cultural group or tradition. Most importantly, ethnicity invokes a sense of bonding relationship and strong communal dynamism. We welcome this blessing to the human community. Ethnicity is a culture which all of us develop as humans. This embraces the whole process of education, starting with the earliest instructions delivered by parents to their children. Each of us is born into a particular family, clan, tribe, nation, culture, language, and so on. Ethnicity expresses what the whole of human life is all about. We function within that context which is reflected in our language, in our cultural institutions, and in the processes and structures of our society. It touches our consciousness, emotional responses, personal relationships, freedom, decisiveness, our human society, economic condition and political situation. The culture within which we have been educated to view ethnicity may be adequate or misleading. Christian leaders do not make a detour from or reject the goodness in ethnicity,

rather, they correct its trajectories in the light of the Good News of Jesus Christ. They have received a mission for the world within the world.

Culture can be geared to the prosperity of the rich at the expense of the poor or one ethnic group at the expense of the other. Ethnicity is a culture, and as "a culture, it must be lived so as to have a meaningful inculturation" (Tangaza Occasional Papers, 1999, p.25). Here a challenge is laid before the Christian leaders. A challenge to be active and creative, and to bring new human relationships, physical structures, and institutions into existence. Now, it is the task of Christian leaders to go into the laboratory of ethnicity to discover what sort of living cultural heritage that will enable them to *build human society founded on justice, peace and equity*. The leadership to which a Christian is called must express itself in involvement in the world. A Christian leader must have something to do with sanctifying the world.

A Christian leader is called in a unique manner to become an instrument of the reign of God, the reign of peace and justice in the human society. In as much as peace and justice belong to those powerful signs of the Kingdom of God present in history, it belongs to the vital mission of a Christian leader to make these realities more perceptible in our time, so deeply marked by oppression, violence, injustice and social discrimination based on status, physical appearance, language, religion and culture. At this point, we recall that "peacemaking is not an optimal commitment. It is a requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers not by some movement of the moment, but by Our Lord Jesus Christ. The content and context of our peacemaking is set not by some political agenda or ideological program, but by the teaching of His Church" (The Pastoral Letter of United States Catholic Bishops, 1983, n.333). In the same methodical thinking, the struggle and "the concern [of economic justice for all] are not at all peripheral to the central mystery of the Church, but lies at the heart of the Church. They are integrated to the proclamation of the Gospel and part of the vocation of every Christian today" (The Pastoral Letter of United States Catholic Bishops, 1986, n.60). As Christians who are truly following the footsteps of Our Risen Lord, making His historical concern our own program and committing our lives to the realization of God's reign in human community, we are urged to be deeply involved in peacemaking and economic justice of our times. Especially, where peace and economic well-being of people of any ethnic group are endangered.

## CONCLUSION

We have to come to the realization that Christian leadership as a service to creation (the caring, pasturing, nurturing and management of the rapidity of ethnicity in Nigeria today) is a great task for Christian leadership in the country. As we face the twentieth century, we have the task of recovering the sound experience of leadership as a service that is rooted in one's daily relationship with Christ. The essence of

true leadership is in making our offices and positions of leadership in the Church and Society a service for all – Jews, and Gentiles alike, the people of South-East and North-East, North-West and South-West alike, the privileged and the unprivileged, the less minorities and the underestimated groups. Christian leadership is destined to serve all of God's People everywhere and for all time and the service penetrates into the situations of our problem-ridden world. The growth and unity of any nation have often been attributed to good leadership. The growth can be measured in terms of struggle to improve road network, medical services, education system, and achieve equitable distribution of wealth and total unity.

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