

## **ARGUMENT AGAINST ETHNICITY, CONFLICTS AND DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA USING THE ETHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES OF EPHESIANS 4:1-6**

### **Abstract**

Nigerian pluralistic society and diversity is a microcosm and representation of the socio-political and ethnic diversities in the African continent. This scenario always affects how citizens perceive reality in the socio-political, economic and religious space in Nigeria. By their common access to God through Jesus Christ, the Church in Nigeria, divided into some blocks, is supposed to transcend all barriers of disunity, conflict and lack of cooperation that presently steer her in the face the presence of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) notwithstanding. This essay surveys some of the elements that undermine ecumenism among Christians in the nation and argues for cooperation and synergy among them employing the biblical imperatives contained in Eph.4:1-6.

### **Introduction**

Africa is a diverse continent with different cultural patterns; such differences exist across different states, nations, races, tribes and ethnic lines (Mashau, 2015, 235). If this assertion is true anywhere in the African continent then it is most true in Nigeria, a country diversely populated in many dimensions: over 500 languages, over 300 tribes with unique cultural practices, “a diverse geography, with climate ranging from arid to humid equatorial” (“Nigeria,” Anthony Hamilton and others, from [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)), 29 duly registered political parties with different ideologies, different religious affiliations, etc. Since the Nigerian church does not exist in a vacuum, the diversity of the country along ethnic, tribal, and cultural lines, also show up in the Church, thus, the attendant conflicts and divisions at different levels of its operations and ministries. In other words, the contemporary Nigerian church being multicultural in nature is not immune from cross cultural conflicts of different kinds. Ironically, cultural diversity in the church is God’s sovereign plan; he authored and brought it to bear on the life of the Church as a ‘gift’ and a ‘means’ to achieve His plans and purposes for the church (cf. Gen., 11:1-9, Acts 2; 15; Rm., 9: 24-33, Eph., 3:6), hence the need to “see it as he sees it- as good and honor it as the handiwork of the wise and sovereign creator, (Duane Elmer, 1993: 23). If ethnic diversity is one of the ‘means’ i.e. a tool for the realization God’s purpose for the church to be able to act in its capacity as his representative to the Nations, how then can the Nigerian church

synthesize her physical (ethnic diversity) and spiritual (doctrinal differences) diversity with the purpose of God, how can this apparent 'diversity', be turned to strength and a platform for her dexterity in becoming a catalyst for national unity and transformation agent in an heterogeneous country like Nigeria? These of course are the thrusts of this paper, i.e., proffering biblical solutions to ethnic based conflicts and divisions which are flaring the contemporary church in Nigeria more than ever before in the light of Ephesians 4:1-6.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Conflict, Division

### **Defining Conceptual Terms**

Because of their significance, certain concepts – Ethnicity, Conflict and Division – employed in this essay are explained below.

### **Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is related somewhat to tribalism, which is the state of being organized in or advocating for, a tribe or tribes; it is a strong loyalty to one's tribe, party or group (religious group, political groups, social groups, etc.). But then it is not totally the same as the former. This is because a tribe might be looked upon as a constituent part of an ethnic group. An ethnic group from African understanding consists in a group of people, whose members are identifiable through several common traits such as common heritage, common culture, a shared language/dialect, and especially descent from common ancestry, and/or religion ("Ethnicity and Tribalism in Africa: The Truth," *Africa and the World Retrieved from [www.africaw.org](http://www.africaw.org)*). To these can be added the issue of common ruled hereditary chief and well-defined geographical region (Paglia, 2016, 7). Essentially, while the Egba, Ijesa, Ekiti, Oyo, Akoko, etc. are various tribal groups in Nigeria, they yet assume one ethnic group namely in the Yoruba nation. By Max Weber's classic definition, cited by T. F. Pettigrew, an ethnic group is a human collectivity based on an assumption of common origin, real or imagined (1974, 180). In this way, the idea of ancestry, common origin or descent and more generally "peoplehood" are at the core of modern usages of the words "ethnic" and "nations" which are derived from some classical sources in the context of the Hellenism (Pagila, 2016, 9). Thus, ethnicity can be seen as shared cultural identity involving similar practices, beliefs and linguistic features passed over from a generation to another which are the strong nursery beds for social, cultural and political organization. It is a phenomenon that makes a people-group different from others. Unfortunately, the phenomenon of ethnicity/ethnic divide,

suppressed earlier by the European colonial governments in Africa, have become resurgent, raising prospects for a myriad of conflicts in most African states (Chogududza, 2008). Presently, ethnicity is a weapon that is not far-fetched to many politicians, opinion leaders and traditional leaders, who employ it for self-aggrandizement and at the same time to inflict maximum injury/damage on their opponents. The Apartheid Regime in South Africa that was truncated at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the crises in Sudan (1995-2000), Chad (1965-1985), Angola (since 1974), Liberia (1980-2003), Somalia (1999-2003), Rwanda and Sierra Leone (1991-2001) are not unconnected with ethnicity (Aremu, 2010, 549). The present armed conflicts in South Sudan and Burundi are other examples. As Ajayi, cited by Aremu, rightly avers, the regularity of conflicts in Africa appears to have become a hallmark of the African continent, meaning that Africa is synonymous with ethnic casualties (Aremu, 2010,550). In Nigeria, for example, political parties formed a few years before and after the independence of 1960 existed on ethnic lines, which were informed by identities and ideologies of each region. These then included Action Group (AG), under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, had Yoruba majority; the Hausa/Fulani who dominated the Northern geographical entity were married to Northern Progressive Congress (NPC) while the Igbo were amenable to the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). Further disintegration into ethnic nationalities included Borno Youth Movement (BYM), Democratic Party of Nigeria and Cameroon (DPNC), Igala Union (IU), Igbira Tribal Union (ITU), Midwest Democratic Front (MDF), National Independence Party (NIP), Niger Delta Congress (NDC), Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), Northern Elements Progressive Party (NEPU), Northern Progressive Front (NPF), United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), etc. It was the tension generated through these ethnic configuration and permutations that eventually resulted in the first Nigerian civil war (1967-1970).

## **Conflict**

Conflict denotes several things, depending on how it is perceived; this occasions how scholarship views its definition. It may be regarded as a particular relationship between states or rival factions within the state which implies subjective hostilities or tension manifested in subjective or military hostilities (Holsti, 1983, 350; cited by Aremu, 2010, 550). In Coser's view, conflict is part of the struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are to injure or eliminate their rivals (Coser, 1998; cited by Aremu, 2010, 550-51). Conflict is thus a major societal

problem and is inevitable, and essentially, common conflict patterns include the demand for ethnic and cultural autonomy, competition for lands, money and power, and those taking place among rival tribal groups. Citing Barker et al, Ekpeyong mentions the fact that the potential for conflict exists whenever and wherever people have contact (2011, 118). This suggests the fact that conflicts can be semi-peaceful, confrontational, violent and uncontrollable in nature; it could create a situation of socio-economic, tribal and political apprehensions. Again, its resultant consequence may be manageable through arbitration or totally irreconcilable. In this way conflict means more than a serious argument or disagreement; it denotes war, fight, battle; competition or opposing actions of incompatible, antagonistic state or action. Conflict, according to Evans (2013), can be classified into four types:

**Interpersonal Conflict:** This comes first, and this refers to a conflict between two individuals, which is, in turn, precipitated by the heterogeneous nature of from, being different from one another. Invariably, varied personalities often result in incompatible choices and opinions. As a natural phenomenon, conflict at this level might, however, assist in personal development especially in relation with others, as it also allows for personal adjustment to avoid undue conflicting situations.

**Intra-personal Conflict:** Being psychological in nature, intrapersonal conflict occurs in the context of an individual; it affects one's thought patterns, values, and emotional principles. It is an inner struggle, which, when not properly managed, could degenerate to restlessness, uneasiness or even depressions. Shedding emotional burdens by relating well with others might help to control this type of conflict.

**Intra-group Conflict:** Everyone is a social being and as such intra-group conflict happens among individuals in a community. This type of conflict degenerates from the society's incompatibilities and misunderstandings involving the individuals in it. Conflicts at this level could require stronger or higher body to resolve.

**Intergroup Conflict:** As the name suggests, intergroup conflict does occur when various groups, constituting a society get involved in misunderstanding. This may involve the members of a given society or a subset of it such as different groups working in an organization or rival tribes. Sometimes, this can be occasioned by competition, rivalry in resources or the boundaries set by a group to others which

establishes their own identity as a group. A main concern presently is that the rate of the increase of armed conflicts in the world in the present time is alarming. Contextual Conspicuous issues include the Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State (aka, Daesh Group) (Middle East), Taliban (Pakistan and Afghanistan) the Al-Shabab (Somalia), the Boko Haram and the Niger-Delta Militants (Nigeria), as well as The Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda) among others. Major damages in human and material resources have been wreaked in France, Brussels, Mauritania, Cote D'Ivoire, Syria and Germany apart from the September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attack on the United States in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Division**

Division connotes the action of separating something or entity into two parts or the process of being separated. In other words, it is a break-up of a thing which hitherto was a single indivisible entity. Its synonyms include disunity, disunion, discord, disagreement, dissension, disaffection, etc. The two terms, defined and explained above, often result in divisions along racial, ethnic, tribal, political and religious lines.

## **The Situation of Disunity and Conflicts in the Nigerian Church**

Politics, disloyalty, oppressive ideas, tussle for leadership, are causes of divisions not only characterize the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria as Peter at al (2011, 360) argues, these scenarios have somewhat characterized and enmeshed the Nigerian church polity altogether. The situation perhaps stem from an unseen struggle between the Churches established by Western missionaries and those native to Africans founded and maintained by Africans. The latter, for example, viewed Western domination of the leadership of the established Churches as a form of "anathema," for which reason they grouped together to form Christian religious groups to be ruled and controlled by common Africans. The birth and pastoral ministry of Moses Orimolade Tunolase in Ikare Akoko (c.1880), who later founded the Cherubim and Seraphim church (popularly referred to as C and S) gave vent to this perception. Seeing from another perspective, doctrinal practices have caused chasm among denominations that they seem to have forgotten that each one supposedly derive its practices from the Holy Scripture but with different hermeneutical approaches emphasis in mind. Those who have hatred for some Zionist Churches do so, on account of their

perceived “fetish” ritual and liturgy e.g. as obtainable in churches such as Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) among others. For example, at their inception, members of indigenous African churches are often derided as “Aladura” (Prayer groups) while the “Aladura” would not bow to the hegemony of Mission Churches, tagging them as emblem of magical confraternity. The uniform of some of the Indigenous churches also constitute further pedestal for discrimination and division. Another point occasioning distrust is in the fact that certain churches claim historical priority in the order of existence in the African/Nigerian sphere. For example, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) achieved a lot in the evangelization and exploration of Nigeria in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, an occasion that could easily degenerate to pride among the members and officers of Methodist Church Nigeria and Church of Nigerian (Anglican Communion) by looking down on denominations not yet founded then. Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) exists, not only to represent all Churches politically but more importantly to shoulder ecumenism among various Christian groups in the country. As Clement I. Osunwokeh avers, every group of persons that claims the name Christian qualifies for membership of CAN (2014, 94). However, the aforementioned scenarios, no doubt, facilitated a number of blocks to which Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is divided: (i) The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); (ii) Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN); (iii) Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN); (iv) Organization of Africa Instituted Churches (OAIC); and (v) TEKAN (i.e. Taraya Ekklessiyoyin Kristi a Nigeria) and ECWA (Evangelical Church Winning All) Fellowship. The divisions and lack of sincere unity in each denomination is a clear signal that in each block of CAN there is altogether no complete truce. This has occasioned avoidable struggles that usually characterize the election of CAN’s key officials such as the President, the Secretary, etc. to the extent of taking issues about the body’s internal election to law court (Godwin, 2016). An overarching objective in the definition of CAN is that:

The Association is a Fellowship of Christian churches with distinct identities, recognizable structures and system of worship of one God in the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Association makes Christ the centre of all its work and shall promote the glory of God by encouraging the growth and unity of churches, and by helping them to lead the nation and her people to partake of Christ’s salvation and all its fruits. The motto is – that they all may be one – John 17:21 (CAN Constitution)

This laudable goal is, however, being compromised on the platform of denominationalism and other selfish agendas up to date. In welcoming delegates to the 2012 Divine Commonwealth Conference (DIVCCON), Archbishop Nicholas Okoh, Primate, Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) is quoted as identifying that, "Disunity among Christians as the main threat from 'within' the Church," and that "this trend had exposed the Church to so many disadvantages." The whole issue is altogether compounded by the numerous and somewhat uncountable number of churches, divisible into Pentecostal, Neo-Pentecostal, Charismatic, Indigenous Zionists, admixture of Islam and Christianity, etc. in the country as at the present time. Those who are through going prosperity preachers and have amassed tangible material wealth also deride the mainline Churches as collections of paupers.

As there is no particular church that is comprised of a particular tribe in Nigeria, two or three or more tribes present in church denomination often foreclose tribal and cultural sentiments. On occasions, there have been denominations dominated by a particular tribe or ethnic group at the expense of others. For example, churches such as Nigerian Baptist Convention, Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), The Apostolic Church (TAC) among others seem to be more populated by the Yoruba; the Roman Catholic Mission have more Igbo while the Hausa-speakers and other allied tribes in Northern Nigeria have monopoly and upper hand in Evangelical Church Winning All (formerly, Evangelical Church of West Africa, acronymed ECWA), and Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) among others. The various languages, numbering up to about 300, spoken by the dominant ethnic/tribal groups are often enough to put others, who are incompatible in such environment, off. The evolution of English-speaking assemblies of several denominations has only helped to mitigate but has not nullify the problem. Further disintegration is precipitated on gender lines: some denominations are patriarchal in nature, ruled and administered by men alone while some allow women's participation to some degree. The former, according to Dorcas Akintude (2010, 150), deny women any leadership functions. This is complicated by the fact that while some Christian groups cherish intellectualism and ministerial training, others deride such as unnecessary; and while some are not too "otherworldly" concerned, getting themselves involved in nation building by partaking in governance through politics, and electioneering campaign, and voting, those who do not subscribe to such ideology look upon the former as being worldly and hypocritical, unduly attaching themselves to the mundane and encumbrances of the present arrangement. Abuse of power by some church

leaders via nepotism in recent times has also led to dissension and members breaking away from the church in some extreme cases where the matter is not managed properly. Examples abound where church appointments, pastors' transfers and contracts for church projects are done or given on the basis of tribal relationship rather than merit. These heinous practices have not been without its concomitant malaise in the church, many assemblies have been scattered because of this. Besides, because of perceived victimization of all kinds, some affected pastors have suddenly become founders and General Overseer of Assemblies where they supposedly aimed at correcting flaws and unscriptural practices that led to their exit, incidentally, such assemblies are turned to another breeding grounds for hatred, disunity and other vices that jeopardize the much coveted unity in the body of Christ. The lists of the situation of disunity and fracas in the Nigerian Church are endless.

### **Towards Ecumenism among the Churches: Employing Biblical Imperatives**

One is safe to aver that issues of disunity and non-functional cooperation among the denominations in Nigeria are an open sore. It has led to nepotism and its attendant by products like conflicts, ethnocentrism, tribalism, segregation, abuse of the things of God, adoption of subjective biblical hermeneutics among others. Obviously, conflict has five major stages namely its initiation, its escalation, its controlled maintenance, its abatement and its termination/resolution (Epkeyong, 2011, 118). Getting the scenario abated and resolved or managed involves the employment of relevant biblical imperatives. This section of this paper connects us with the biblical imperatives contained in Eph. 4:1-6.

### **The Setting of the Ephesian Letter**

The present essay does not get deeply engaged in the controversy surrounding the authorship of the letter to the Ephesians. To the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Pauline authorship of Ephesians was never questioned by the Church. However, modern scholarly opinion regarding the Pauline authorship of the Epistle is divided is divided, with perhaps a majority of scholars today holding that the letter was not written by Paul. K. T. Resane, citing R. Schnackenburg relates the history of the controversy thus:

Theodore of Mopsuestia and Jerome recognized at an early date the difficulty of its being addressed to Ephesus, and Erasmus saw its style as deviating from that of Paul; but it was not until E. Evanson (1792), L. Usteri (1824), De Wette (1826) and especially F. C. Baur and his school that Paul's authorship was disputed (Resane, 2008, 136).

De Wette's dissension, like Evanson, Usteri and several others, stemmed from the style and address of the Epistle and proposed the idea that a pseudonymous author wrote Ephesians in the name of Paul; Baur rejected the Pauline authorship in *Two Volumes on Paul* (c. 1845-1876), and stated that there are Gnostic ideas from Ephesians as well as Colossians, argued that Ephesians should be situated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (cited by Alford, 1968, 8-9; Resane, 2008, 137). Their argument has been hinged on stylistic differences, vocabulary, impersonal character of the Ephesians, its theology, especially its lack of eschatological tone when Ephesians is compared with other Pauline corpus. This situation is rather ironic in that a good number of scholars (e.g. C. H. Dodd; J. A. Robinson, Donald Guthrie, J. B. Polhill, Arrt van Roon, etc.) have esteemed Ephesians as the "crown" of Paul's thought (cited by Arnold, 1993, 240; Resane, 2008, 139). At the face value, Ephesians appears to be situation-less unlike other Pauline Epistles but it has real, practical concerns to which it was authored to address. According to Arnold, "Of all the Pauline letters, Ephesians is the least situational, this does not mean that the letter fails to address real needs and problems faced by its readers" (Ibid.). Consequently, a vast of array of opinions has been expressed regarding why the Epistle was composed. A critical perusal through the contents of the letters provides a guide to each reader as to read between the lines to determine the life situation of the Epistle.

The letter to the Ephesians, well organized and thoughtfully crafted, was not addressed to nomadic or rural people; it was rather a correspondence to a pluralistic community of Christians. Since the phrase "in Ephesus" in ch. 1:1 is not found in all ancient manuscripts, this suggests that this letter was meant to be read in other Churches apart from the Church at Ephesus. In fact, many scholars are of the opinion that Ephesians was written as a circular letter to be passed from church to church (Hale, 2007, 725). One may rely on this theory to assert that the background situation of some of the apostolic instruction of the Epistle can be understood in the unknown situation of the surrounding churches who also received the Epistle. It could also be that the surrounding local stations were at conflicting situations among themselves. A major teaching advanced in the

first part of the work (chs.1-3) consists in the unity of Jew and Gentile, which is a standard measure of a New Testament church to justify its affiliation with God. Constable asserts that:

...Emphasis on the Church as Christ's body, in which both Jewish and Gentile believers are one, suggests that Paul wrote to promote unity in the Ephesian Church and in the universal church. The emphasis on the importance of love is also strong. More than one-sixth of Paul's references to "love" in his 13 epistles occur in Ephesians. This also shows that he wanted to promote Christian unity in the Church (Constable, 2016, 2).

The Epistle was meant to provide doctrinal and practical teaching to the Church. No doubt, the clarion ecumenical call was informed by the effect of the event of Christ which has brought about the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile by incorporating them into one body (Eph.2:16; 3:6). John Stott might be correct when he says that:

The letter focuses on what God did through the historical work of Jesus Christ and does through his Spirit today, in order to build his new society in the midst of the old (Stott, 1979, 24).

Arnold (1993, 247) mentions that "Christ has removed all of the obstacles that separated the two groups and resulted in their hostility to one another." Essentially, this indicates that in the new society of God, founded on the event of Christ, what matters is the integration and unity of the body of Christ, i.e. the Church, comprising individuals, in spite of whatever grounds for hostility, who have equal access to God.

### **The Biblical Imperatives for Ecumenism in the Passage**

Chapter 4 of Ephesians constitutes the beginning of the hortatory (i.e. ethical application) of the first three chapters that delve into theological matters, an idea that characterizes most of the letters to the Churches of the New Testament. Ephesians chaps. 1 – 3 discuss the benefits accruable to the Ephesians through the historic intervention of God in the affairs of humanity in Christ. In Paul's Churches, "Paul's imperatives are dependent upon his indicatives; his *didache* (teaching) is determined by his *kerygma* (proclamation), and all things ethical are derived from dogmatic doctrine" (Barth, 1974, 426; cited by Resane, 2008, 141-42). Essentially, theology and ethics cannot be separated; they are interwoven

because the former provides the foundation for the latter. Contextually, Leander E. Keck makes the following statement exalting New Testament ethics:

Morals can be taught, and usually are, without explicit the sapiential judgments and the ideas that inform them; but there is no ethics without ideas, and no New Testament ethics without theological ideas. Surely the New Testament authors, and many of their...readers, thought so too (Keck, 1996, 8).

There might be other sources for ethical living; the Christian cannot live in isolation of the moral dictates of the Holy Scriptures, which is the foundation for moral theology. Joel B. Green asserts that the Church that turns to the Bible as Christian Scripture does so on account of its belief that the Bible is authoritative for faith and life, for what we believe and what we do. In the context of the Ephesians, James R. Janke succinctly puts it that:

Paul's encouragement...does not mean that the Ephesians should somehow become worthy of having received...calling (*into Christianity*), that they should earn it as a right, nor does it mean that they need to make some contribution toward making their calling a fact. He simply wants his readers to realize what glorious calling they have and gently urges them to live accordingly (Janke, 1993).

According to him (i.e. Green), working out the shape of faithful life before God, then, necessarily involves interacting with, learning from, and sometimes struggling with the Church's Scripture (2013, xiii). In Eph. 4, the ethical behaviour introduced to the Church was to constitute their life pattern; hence it is introduced with the word *peripath/sai* an infinitive aorist active verb (from *peripatew*). It has been variously translated as "live" (NIV) or "walk" (KJV), connoting how one conducts life and behaviour; the term, commending itself to the Ephesians, is employed 4 times until the end of the letter (ch.4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15) inasmuch as they had the mandate of conducting their life in a manner worthy of God. Certain imperatives, both ethical and theological, calling for altruism and ecumenism, are mentioned in the passage which deserves attention.

### **Ethical Imperatives for Unity**

The writer recommended certain ethical imperatives towards their need of inculcating ecumenical spirit in their fold. According to the Apostle, inculcating these values would be significant in helping to preserve the unity of the Spirit

(*th.n e`no,thta tou/ pneu,matoj*) of accord, attitude and emotion in the community (4:3). This unity (*e`no,thç*) is the one of which Luther speaks when he says of the Holy Spirit that he “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Church on earth, and keep it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (SC, II, 6; cited Janke, 1993). These imperatives are indicated by some nouns.

### **Humility (*tapeinofrosu,nhj*)**

The Ephesians needed to inculcate the ethical imperative of being indicated by the Greek *tapeinofrosu,nhj*. The word occurs only rarely in non-biblical Greek and even there employed with a sense of cowardice to describe a virtue (i.e. humble disposition) “unrecognized in Greco-Roman ethics” but glorified in Christianity (Salmond, 1980, 320). It consists in honesty about human proper place in the divine ordering of creation; it is a repudiation of self to meet the need of others. It holds in check the perverse human tendency to “play God.” Luke (Acts 20:19), Paul (Philp.2:3; Col.3:12; negatively in Col.2:18, 23 with reference to false teaching), and the author of I Peter (5:5) commended it to their congregations. Its qualifying *pa,shj* in Eph. 4:2a suggests that *tapeinofrosu,nhj*, as a spirit of self-examination, is to characterize all of Christian life. Essentially, it is a hermeneutic of suspicion toward oneself and charity towards those one disagree with. It is a virtue for social link. At the social level of a modern society tainted by terrorism, conflicts, wars and other calamities, humility is associated with a world-renouncing mentality that produces inaction and a retreat from serious engagement in the struggle, so essential to democracy, for justice and the common good. Nevertheless, Christian humility has nothing to do with such self-esteem and somber self-accusation.

It is rather attained in self-identification with God, whose purpose one is called to serve in life. One of Augustine’s great insights, accurately described in the *Confessions*, is that knowledge of self is inextricably linked to the knowledge of God. In other words, true self-knowledge is found only in relationship to the divine (cf. Isa.58:10) (Ruddy, 2016, 209-213). Writing in Latin-speaking North Africa at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, St. Augustine of Hippo consistently presents humility as a central notion for understanding Christ (the humble God) in the Gospel narratives and the Christian way of life. In Augustine’s view, humility is strategic to Christian discipleship. The theological basis for Augustine’s doctrine of humility is in his Christology, where he upholds Christ as the archetype of Christian humility so that a truly compelling, transforming and comprehensive account of this virtue must derive from an understanding of Christ who grounds,

and animates true humility (cf. Philp.2:5-8) (Cited by Ruddy, 2016, 213). Contextually, then, one way to understand humility is to see it in opposition to pride, which is the root of human sin expressed in the desire to substitute self for God and dominate over others. In extra-biblical parlance, pride is abhorred: “the beginning of all sin is pride, and the beginning of the pride of man is to fall off from God” (*Sirach* 10:13). In freeing us from egocentricity, humility brings joy in the discovery of the true value of ourselves and others in God. It has a radically social dimension whereby it finds expression in service to others and in radical self-giving modeled after the example of Christ, who built his body (the Church). Nothing can be more destructive to the Church than the absence of humility among the members.

### **Gentleness** (*prau-thtoj*)

The KJV translates this virtue as “meekness,” which denotes a gentle spirit expressible in patient submissiveness to offence, from malice and desire to revenge; it is displayed in situations of conflict in which an individual is unable to control or influence circumstances. Its ordinary English Dictionary meaning of “being too submissive,” “spineless,” and “spiritless” (McKenzie, 1978, 1119) is somewhat misleading in nature. For example, when the same word was employed by Jesus and the blessedness characterizing those who exercise it (Matt.5:5), he did not use it in the context of “spineless,” “effeminate,” or “spiritless” individuals. When applied with reference to wild animals, the Greek *prau-thtoj* “to tame,” because such animals have not lost their strength but have learned to control the destructive instincts that prevent them from living in harmony with others. Typical human responses in such circumstances include frustration, bitterness or anger. Invariably, it is mentioned among the Christian qualities itemized in Gal.5:22-23 such that the one who is guided by God’s Spirit accepts God’s ability to direct events (cf. Matt.11:29; 21:5; II Cor. 10:1; Col. 3:12; I Tim. 6:11; Tit.3:2; James 1:21; 3:13). The Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5:5) further shows the significance of the virtue. Meekness is, therefore, an active and deliberate acceptance of undesirable circumstances that are wisely seen by the individual as only part of a larger picture (Meier, 1996). Meekness does not identify the weak but more precisely the strong who have been placed in position of weakness where they persevere without giving up. In the Ancient Near and Greco-Roman world milieu, a high premium was placed on this virtue of meekness. Near Eastern kings were not reluctant in describing themselves as

meek because of the intricacies attached to their kingly tasks in the same context in which they described themselves as mighty kings.

### **Patience** (*makroqumi,aj*) **and Forbearance** (*avneco,menoi avllh,lwn*)

Like meekness, the duo of patience and forbearance is a state of endurance under difficult circumstance; this is underscore by *avneco,menoi avllh,lwn* in its present participle, denoting continuing action and matches the “all” in the first phrase (4:3a). Rather than pushing others away on account of their faults and frailties, the Ephesians were urged to keep holding to each other through the virtue of patience and forbearance (cf. Col.3:13). Buddha viewed that the “greatest prayer anyone can offer in life is patience”: “God, the Ultimate Reality (or the *Tao*) did not create hurry” (Cited by Patrick Low, 2012, 728). The qualities mean persevering in the face of delay or provocation without acting on annoyance/anger in a negative way. It connotes exhibition of forbearance when under strain, especially when faced with long-term difficulties.

All these virtues are to be executed *evn avga,phl* (“in love”) – love for God and for fellow men of the same household of God for whom Christ also endured the cross. Being like divine love, this *avga,phl* (love) takes into consideration the condition of its object and adjusts its actions accordingly.

### **Imperative for Theological Unity (4:4-6)**

In Eph.4:4-6, Paul presented three theological facts in three groups of three each. Janke refers to them as “trinity of unities.” In presenting these nine points of unity, he uses the numeral “one” some seven times to press home his point on the subject.

#### The 1st Triad

The first triad consists of “body” (*sw/ma*), “spirit” (*pneu/ma*), and “hope” (*evlpi,j*). The Church is “one body” (cf. Eph.1:22; I Cor.12:12, 13, 25; Gal.3:28) and “one Spirit,” and this is true because all its members are “called to one hope when they were called” individually. Both NIV and KJV capitalize the word “Spirit” for *pneu/ma*; if someone prefers a lower case “s,” such a change would not affect the truth the author enunciated. This is because there is a unity of spirit in the Church, and that unity is always the product of the one Holy Spirit. Thus, the invisible/mystical church which is united with Christ is to manifest/demonstrates physically that unity through obedience to the ethical imperatives for unity as

enjoined in the passage and consequently, becoming a model of 'unity in diversity' to the divided world.

### The 2nd Triad

The second triad is simple: "one Lord," "one faith," and "one baptism." The Greek makes this simple enumeration more interesting with its use of the genders of the numeral "one": ei-j, mia, }En. This is the "one true faith" Luther referred to in his explanation of the Third Article. Christian call was sealed by one Baptism, a baptism into the name of the Triune God, "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Tit.3:5). There is just ei-j ku,rioj (one Lord), one Saviour (cf. Jn. 6:68).

### The 3rd Triad

The third triad is structured differently. The numeral "one" occurs only once in it, but the unity here is shown in a threefold relation: "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." There is but one Father who is over each and everyone who are members of the Church (cf. The Lord's Prayer, Matt.6:9). The phrase *evn pa/sin* ("in all") in 4:6b, no doubt, refers to the fact that the Father and Son have come to tabernacle with the Church through the agency of the Spirit (cf. I Cor.3:16).

## Recommendations

Although Nigeria is stratified along various lines as mentioned earlier in this thesis, the Church should not in any way complicate the scenario. In the context of ethnicity, tribalism, and conflict in the Nigerian Church community, the ethical imperative of Eph. 4:2-3, rendered in the New Living Translation (NLT): "Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's fault because of love"; New American Standard Bible (NASB): "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love," commends itself as it did to the Ephesians and its surrounding territories, given that the letter was a circular one. In a sense, the virtues – i.e. habits, tendencies of character to act in accordance with practical reason toward worthy ends – correspond with Aristotle's cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude (cf. *Wis. Sol.* 8:7). They are meant to promote and preserve ecumenism in the society of men but especially in Christian community. The unity of faith to which all members of Christian community in spite of

denominational differences are called here is a clarion call to bury all doctrinal, cultural, and ethnic differences and come together to pursue a common goal.

In this way, the Holy Scripture should be translated to more Nigerian languages so that the Church can learn and understand divine injunction on the Church being a team playing organization. The ecclesiastical functionaries of each denomination should be awake to their responsibility of explaining the Scriptures to their constituents the subject under consideration, using accurate hermeneutical insight that is void of bias and sentiments. This is important because most of the divisions in Christendom have been occasioned by incorrect understanding of the revelation of God. CAN must cease being a political umpire for all Church denominations alone, and stop looking up to Government for funding; the body should make effort shouldering the responsibility of reaching to warring denominations with the goal of resolving present crises and raise fund for its activities for who pays the piper also reserves the right to dictate the tune. Possibly, CAN can have an arbitrating body to look into all intra and inter denominational litigations in each Church with a view to resolving them. All campaigns of calumny over elective positions in this apex body of the Church in the country should be nipped in the bud.

## **Conclusion**

There has been no time in the historical past and in the present time that the Church has been thoroughly united. Ecclesiastical incidents on the pages of the New Testament and as derived from the history of the church help to argue this fact out. No external factor is to be blamed for the scenario; the Church has consistently failed to attain to ecumenical spirit because of its failure to examine the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles on the subject. The warring situations resulting in ethnicity, conflicts and conflicts in the Church would only demean the value and significance of the Church on the earth plain in Nigeria. There are conspicuous situations that demand the presence and spirit of unity and cooperation among Church denominations in the present time more than ever: (i) there is a need to join hands with the governments of the day to fight terrorism; (ii) the evangelical task given to Christian community can only be executed, with maximum results, when there is holistic support for it; (iii) there must be a paradigm shift from competitive ministry mentality which hitherto permeates contemporary church in Nigeria to a complementary ministry devoid of competitions that breeds rancor and divisions, (iv) CAN. should be a platform for promoting biblical ecumenical spirit of unity in diversity that “promotes the

emphasis of Bible truth.,”(Kato 1975: 170), (v) the need for the church to be more proactive in its societal involvements by speaking fearlessly with one voice to denounce any unwholesome socio-political imbroglios in the country.

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