

**IMPERATIVENESS OF UNITY, PEACE AND PROGRESS IN THE INTEGRAL  
DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF CONSECRATED PERSONS**

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**Abstract**

*Unity, peace and progress are cardinal and germane to the issue of development of any society hence the Nigerian government and many other nations of the world cannot overemphasize the sine qua non of the foregoing concepts. A closer look at the Nigerian coat of arm is the vivid inscription "Unity, Peace and Progress" pointing to the imperativeness of these concepts in the development of Nigeria. It unfortunate that this expected environment seems elusive and seriously threatened by an atmosphere of crisis, conflict and obnoxious spilling of innocent blood. Nigerians recently have continued to live in fear and tension. In spite of the acclaimed efforts by the government to beef up security in the nation, senseless killings of innocent Nigerians, continue especially in the north central part of the country but has failed in that responsibility. This unfortunate situation no doubt places a gigantic question mark on the extent and sincerity of the acclaimed unity, peace and progress in Nigeria. In the face of sustained attacks by the herdsmen marauders on Christian churches and farmers in Nigeria, what can the consecrated persons do to forestall the eroding unity, peace and progress in Nigeria which are inseparable to development is the crux of this paper. The writer observed that consecrated persons have been both proactive and active in using their God given platforms in spreading the messages of peace and tolerance and warns that they might not be able to guarantee the elasticity of the patience exhibited by their subjects as this continually has been misconstrued as cowardice.*

**Keywords:** consecrated, consecrated person, unity, peace, progress, development

## INTRODUCTION

Transformation of societies into united, peaceful and progressive social orders, and the development of an enabling environment capable of maintaining this arrangement, requires a continuum of building of bridge activity across ethnic and religious divides. It is critical to explore both current and potential capacity for consecrated persons in these regard with respect to the whole range of activities and potential impact. Past efforts by the community of consecrated persons around Nigeria aimed at engendering change will be illustrated and other potential approaches required to serve as a catalyst in the sustenance of unity, peace and progress will also be highlighted. This is aimed at ensuring integral development of Nigeria.

The call for a contribution to the project of unity, peace and progress for all from consecrated persons actually corresponds to the idea of accountability to God or to holy texts. The test of this accountability must be whether they fulfilling these responsibilities for the Nigeria society, since all are created and in equal need of unity, peace and progress for their well-being, safety, and happiness. Traditional values and religious practices must show our willingness to care for all. Consecrated persons accountability to God, particularly as representatives of faith traditions and communities first established in certain limited contexts must be broader, since the community has now become part of a wider and eventually a global fellowship. Faithfulness to God and traditional values must be tested by answering these unavoidable questions: are you serving all people, and their need for unity, peace and progress, whatever race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, generation or gender they are?

Today consecrated persons knowing well that what they do or fail to do somehow has an impact on the whole. There is no way to turn back to merely national interests, or to local or tribal realities, ignoring the present reality of our Nigerian environment where unity, peace and progress are fast eroding. Consecrated persons have means of communication that can serve unity, peace and progress in Nigeria and globally and the economy will thrive better in an atmosphere of unity, peace and progress.

Unity, peace and progress are cardinal and germane to the issue of development of any society hence the Nigerian government and many other nations of the world cannot overemphasize the sine qua non of the foregoing concepts. A closer look at the Nigerian coat of arm is the vivid inscription "Unity, Peace and Progress" pointing to the imperativeness of these concepts in the development of Nigeria. It unfortunate that this expected environment seems elusive and seriously threatened by an atmosphere of crisis, conflict and obnoxious spilling of innocent blood. Nigerians recently have continued to live in fear and tension. In spite of the acclaimed efforts by the government to beef up security in the nation, senseless killings of innocent Nigerians, continue especially in the north central part of the country, while the issues kidnappings and periodic murders are on the increase.

The failure of government at all levels and her security agencies to provide adequate security for all Nigerians is a grave form of abuse of human dignity. This

unfortunate situation no doubt places gigantic question mark on the extent and sincerity of unity, peace and progress leading to distrust of government and her allied authorities. Evil tends to increase and dangerous arms being paraded and used to unleash mayhem on innocent rural dwellers by criminally minded herdsmen. In the face of sustained attacks by the herdsmen marauders on Christian churches and farmers in Nigeria, what can the consecrated persons do to forestall the eroding unity, peace and progress in Nigeria which are inseparable to sustainable development is the crux of this paper.

The writer observed that the recent crisis is as a result of the present government insensitivity and inaction. It has been observed that this is dangerous to the unity, peace and progress of Nigeria.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

### **Consecrated**

To make or declare sacred; set apart or dedicated to the service of a deity

**Consecrated life**, in the canon law of the Catholic Church, is a stable form of Christian living by those faithful who are called to follow Jesus Christ in a more exacting way recognized by the Church. It "is characterized by the public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, in a stable state of life recognized by the Church".<sup>1</sup> The Code of Canon Law defines it as "a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having been dedicated by a new and special title to his honour, to the building up of the Church, and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, foretell the heavenly glory."<sup>2</sup>

What makes the consecrated life a more exacting way of Christian living is the public religious vows or other sacred bonds whereby the consecrated persons commit themselves, for the love of God, to observe as binding the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience from the Gospel, or at least, in the case of consecrated virgins and widows/widowers, a vow of total chastity. The Benedictine vow as laid down in the Rule of Saint Benedict, ch. 58:17, is analogous to the more usual vow of religious institutes. Consecrated persons are not part of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, unless they are also ordained bishops, priests or deacons.<sup>3</sup>

**Unity:** The state or fact of being united or combined into one as of the parts of a whole.

**Peace:** Peace means a lot of things to different folks. To the philosophers, peace is seen as a natural, original, God-given state of human existence. Peace from this view point is the pre-corruption state of man in a society, as God established it. Thus St. Augustine distinguished between two cities namely the city of God which is founded on perfect heavenly peace and spiritual salvation; and the earthly city of man which is founded appetitive and possessive impulse, is corrupt and torn by

strife. To Rousseau, he conceptualises a peaceful original state of existence of man in which there are no desires. In that state man existed as a free, gentle savage. In this state, men were naturally good as they were born free. In contrast though, Hobbes argues that in the state of nature was rampant with conflict and violence. Life to him was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short hence the need for a social contract where all men will surrender their defence to a leviathan.<sup>4</sup>

According to the University for Peace, peace is a political condition that makes justice possible.<sup>5</sup> Peace can also be conceived as a normal, nonwarring condition of a nation, group of nations or the world. It also implies a state of freedom from civil commotion and violence of a community, public order and security.

**Progress:** Progress can be defined as a movement towards a goal or to a further or higher stage. It connotes a development activity in science, technology, etc, especially with reference to the commercial opportunities created thereby or to the promotion of the material well-being of the public through the goods, techniques, or facilities created.

### **What is Development?**

According to Carl Pearson, "development is an ancient concept but one which, in our modern age, has acquired new meaning and purpose. Its pursuit unites two strands of human thought: the belief in progress and the conviction that man can master his destiny" <sup>6</sup> Development has varied interpretations depending from the scholar's viewpoint. The concept of development and in this case rural development in Nigeria lacks a unified definition as different scholars tend to view it from varying perspective. While some scholars look at rural development from the aspect of educational training, others view it from the angle of availability of infrastructure within a community. Koffi Annan, a former United Nations Secretary General, provides a good example of an international relations scholar who suggested in a 2003 *United Nations Human Development Program Report* that "development embraces human rights and good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual in rural and urban areas has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her own potential"<sup>7</sup> Annan's opinion no doubt underscores the very essence of establishing the local government system as a third tier of government, hence development cannot occur where individuals at the rural level are not giving opportunities to fulfil their potentials. No matter what may be said about development, it has become clear that the concept of development has undergone profound changes over the years. The very meaning of development has been altered from an almost exclusive pre-occupation with national income to a broader interpretation that encompasses the questions of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

For this study, Development in agreement with Olatunbosun will mean addressing material imperatives of the people i.e. ensuring the basic needs of the people such that facilitates their wellbeing and shows improvement is realized. These materials include quality education, primary health care, clean environment, decent shelter, etc. The Second is freedom from misery or servitude and lastly

development entails enjoying respect and self worth as a result of mastering our destiny and environment as conceptualized by him. But despite this assertion, the rural areas in Nigeria are grossly neglected as far as development projects and infrastructures such as hospitals, roads, schools, markets, etc are concerned. For instance, in terms of level of economic development, quality of life, access to opportunities, facilities and amenities, standard of living and general viability, there is ample evidence to underscore the level of under-development.<sup>8</sup>

#### **UNITY, PEACE AND PROGRESS: FOUNDATIONAL TO DEVELOPMENT**

Peace prevails where everyone has fair and equal access to justice and an atmosphere to live in security. Without peace there can never be unity, therefore, peace is the pivot upon which unity must rotate and the by-product no doubt is progress. Peace sustains only in a situation where everyone is able to participate in shaping their destiny and decision makers are accountable to the people. Peace is, therefore, a state of order, of freedom from fear and want, of being secure. In such a society as Prophet Micah says, "Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid" (Micah 4:4). When this type of atmosphere is created where no one is afraid of his neighbour and injustice is drastically reduced or totally eradicated then development is encouraged and guaranteed.

Worrisomely, it is a matter of serious concern today that we are forced to live in situations where unity and peace are threatened and justice being denied hence leading to stunted progress much needed for the development of the Nigerian society. The greed of powerful individuals excludes others, concentrate only in accumulation of wealth and exploitation of resources, leaving others dispossessed and impoverished. The domination of the rich and the powerful causes discord and adds deprivation. All these factors increase domination, marginalization, violence, conflicts, poverty and sufferings in human life. It is not God's will that such a situation should exist, but it contradicts the purposes of God's ways of living together as a nation. Living together in peace and unity with a collaborative spirit and mutually recognizing and respecting this atmosphere will make our nation a progressive one and engender development. A place where peace with unity and progress prevail, such a situation no doubt will provide the propelling springboard that will encourage development. Peace is basically a gift of God, and is related to God's blessing and God's graciousness therefore, the consecrated persons as the mouthpiece of God should rise up to the challenges threatening the unity, peace and progress of Nigeria.

The absence of unity and peace resulting in lack or stunted progress in the Nigerian context are to be understood not merely in the contexts of violence and other manifestations of crises. Denial of the basic socio-economic and human rights to a vast number of people basically leads to a situation where peace and unity are sacrificed on the altar of the much needed development of the Nigeria society.

Nigeria is today faced with an ever increasing level of multifaceted socio-economic, political and security challenges. A wide array of problems is precipitating in Nigerian societies, causing threat to peace, unity and lack of progress. Armed conflicts and violence, bombings, increasing poverty, inadequate health care, economic exploitation, environmental degradation and over militarization of the society, killer herdsman rampages, ethnic and religious conflicts, communal violence, and political unrest, suppression of opposition and muzzling of people's legitimate right to self-determination; lack of rule of law and democratic governance are part of a series of issues affecting Nigeria's quest for unity, peace and progress. There is no doubt that these factors are seriously hampering development in Nigeria.

### **ROLES OF CONSECRATED PERSONS IN ENSURING UNITY, PEACE AND PROGRESS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Drawing from the foregoing, in this context the consecrated persons in Nigeria are called to be peace makers and to be courageous, committed and consistent in their efforts in order to be credible voices in the household of God. Consecrated persons using the platform of the Church are also called to be instruments of God's purpose in the world and especially within the Nigerian context. This call extends to them taking concrete action in peace-building in order to move beyond conflict resolutions. The consecrated persons under the auspices of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should extend the peace and unity within the movement to the community of people who belong to other faiths as this will help engender progress and development of the Nigerian society. Peace, unity and progress continues to be a major concern of the Nigerian society and in this context we will be highlighting some of the impacts made so far by the community of consecrated persons with a clarion call on them to do more in these regard.

The central theme of the Christian faith is *"love for one another"* and this is often seen in the regular teachings of the church aimed at promoting co-existence, peace building, unity in ethnic-diversity, tolerance, generosity, hospitality, forgiveness and justice. The Christian faith is built on the message of unconditional love for one another and even love for one's enemies. To love one's enemies means taking on the very practice of the unconditional love of God – which means regardless of the nationality, race, colour, background, gender or social or economic status of a person, the Christian message of love cuts through all the likely biases or prejudices. Such a message of love gives no room for anyone to hate or indiscriminate harm. Even when hurt or offended, the Christian message urges forgiveness rather than retaliation or vengeance. It is for this reason that the consecrated persons have been saddled with the divine mandate to provide hope for peace, unity and progress in our societies. This they have done and continued to do using their various church pulpits. By organizing religious seminars, crusades and church activities climaxing on every Sunday services messages of peace and unity are spread encouraging adherents and the larger society to embrace tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

The church stands for unity and peace and plays and continues to play its role by teaching people against unacceptable behaviour, extremism or fundamentalism that would be injurious to others and provide mediation and reconciliation in conflict situations whenever they occur. Consecrated persons at all times teach and harp on the promotion of a culture of co-existence between people in a wide diversity of groups such as ethnicity, nationalities, multi-religious, socio-economic complexities etc.

The Bible defines the consecrated person as well as the entire body of Christ as the light of the world and the salt of the earth. This means that the consecrated persons are set as a guide to show what is right, and to preserve what is right. They have always stood out in pointing the society to what is right, correcting wrongs, and promoting values that enhance peaceful co-existence regardless of racial, social, tribal, ethnicity or political affiliations of an individual or group of persons. Without the role played by the consecrated person in this sphere the chaos in the Nigerian society would have become inevitably unmanageable.

The body of Christ's central message of love has been the anchor for peace building and unity which is not only directed to those in the congregations alone but also to everyone in society. The consecrate persons in a bid to achieve this have always urged its members to act upon the message and subsequently influencing others in the general public to act accordingly and to behave in appropriate manner. When the Church *'lives the word'*, it will enable the average person in the community to emulate such conduct. (Psalms 133:1-3 *Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity...upon this (unity) God commands a blessing.*)

Consecrate persons are divinely called to be watchmen to warn people of the dangers of wickedness. Obviously, most of them they have consistently done this while a good number of others are drawn away by materialism thereby neglecting their God given mandate. *"Son of man, I have made you a watchman... give them warning from me"* (Ezek. 3:17; 33:3). The danger inherent in this mandate is that failure to heed and abide by this divine role attracts punishment from God. *"... and thou giveth him not warning, nor speakest to warn ... but his blood will I require at thine hand"* (Ezek. 3:18). The implication therefore is that consecrated persons have a critical role to play in ensuring that there is peace, unity and progress in a given society. Although they cannot do this alone without the government at all levels, it is the believe of this researcher that government synergising with the consecrated persons, civil societies and non faith-based organisations such as NGOs will help in ensuring unity, peace and progress which are the springboards to propel integral development of Nigeria.

The writer also observed that consecrated persons have been both proactive and active in using their God given platforms in spreading the message of peace and tolerance and warns that they might not be able to guarantee the elasticity of the patience exhibited by their subjects as this continually has been misconstrued as cowardice. It also pertinent to observe that most consecrated persons who do not have access to the pulpits can also use other means to promote unity, peace and progress in Nigeria. Such means include:

1. Devotion to Prayer for the peace of country
2. Works of charity

3. Catechesis
4. Evangelism through home to home visitation

The project of unity, peace and progress cannot be a one show but a united action by both the clergy and the laity. It is obvious that majority of the Nigerian population (politicians inclusive) form the bulk of laity either belonging to one church or mosque. Therefore it beholds on all hand being on deck to assiduously strive towards ensuring unity, peace and progress for the development of the country.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The consecrated persons should allow and be seen to set an example for open and peaceful relationships and transfer 'this' way of life to the remainder of the society. (*Mtt.5:9 Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called sons of God.*)

One of the most profound teachings of Jesus Christ was the Sermon on the mount where he taught the 'beatitudes'. He bestowed blessings on peacemakers and that such people shall be called the sons of God. The consecrated persons ought to apply this message by ensuring that the communities and societies live in peace, promote conflict resolution and reconciliation across all forms of boundaries.

Consecrate persons should continue to Propagate the message of love (*Matthew 5:43-46 "You have heard the law that says 'love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say, 'love your enemies!' ...."*) (1Peter 4:8 "*Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins*")

Consecrated persons should undertake the role of observer mission as Christian Peacemaker especially in crisis environments. The observer mission role can equally extend to election observing and collations of election results as this will reduce incidences of result manipulations. No doubt this will ensure election result credibility and acceptance.

For example in Zimbabwe, a team was sent during all periods of conflict, though the most common practice has been to send them during a low level period of violence. In this regard, a combination of indigenous and external actors from the Catholic Church performed an important monitoring role in the transition leading to Zimbabwe's independence in the 1970s. The Commission for Justice and Peace (JPC), based in Salisbury, Rhodesia and the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), based in London, set up a system to monitor human rights abuses of blacks. During this war for liberation, reports from the two institutions did much to inform the outside world and provide hope to the oppressed. It was truth telling, more than the achievement of justice or peace, for which these Catholic institutions were remembered during this period.<sup>9</sup>The community of consecrated persons can also be remembered for taking on such mission in a bid to ensuring unity, peace and progress in Nigeria.

Another pertinent recommendation is that consecrated persons should be actively involved in area of peace-building especially a crisis devastated



communities. The peace activity of the Christian Council of Mozambique, an ecumenical body of Protestant churches, illustrates an educational approach in the context of a very violent situation. In 1991, toward the end of close to thirty years of civil war, they launched a "Preparing People for Peace Program." In this program, the churches designed training courses related to political issues, such as nonviolence, human rights, disarmament, amnesty, repatriation, land distribution and healing a war-damaged environment. Social issues like public health, trauma treatment, child development and the family were also addressed. In addition, they led seminars on biblical peacemaking, reconciliation and practical conflict resolution skills. The program was organized in two phases: a five week seminar held in Maputu for representatives from all Protestant and Catholic churches; followed by a two week follow-up seminar held in each province for district representatives. Future programs, planned as of June 1994, included a nationwide meeting of reconciliation designed to bring together the whole Mozambican family in celebration and worship.<sup>10</sup> Consecrated persons in Nigeria can borrow a leaf from this and replicate same in the crisis environment in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

The research illustrates that although consecrated persons may be better prepared for certain peace-building roles, peace, unity and progress by definition requires an integral approach. This represents an enormous challenge. Its effectiveness involves bringing different constituencies and different dynamics together: multiple spiritual and secular perspectives, civil society and governmental bodies, leaders and leadership, and strategy, and services/interventions and advocacy.

Ecumenical and inter-religious collaboration offer valuable insights into the workings of process-structures, which are core to sustained pursuance of peace, unity and progress. It is believed that when this is achieved the much talked about development would be achieved.

Peace, unity and progress depend on a large extent to the situation where justice prevails, and society is free from any conflict. Conflict in any form contributes to denial of justice and dignity and rights of people and communities. Given the fact that denial of justice are often a precursor to and always a consequence of violent conflicts, churches and ecumenical councils must contribute to their witness in protection of individuals and communities by working with others to build peaceful societies. Justice includes every form of social, economic, political and ecological concerns. It is clear that human security is multi-dimensional.

Consecrated persons' unity and peace-building efforts geared towards progress must be firmly rooted in shalom (salaam, peace), affirming both justice and reconciliation and avoiding both mere pacification and a crusade mentality. Implementation of this vision of personal, relational, communal and social wholeness requires the consecrated persons to pursue an optimal integration of

“social justice building” and “direct violence reducing” methodologies. Catholic social teaching/practice spells out four concrete elements involved in this process of establishing right relationships. It calls all Catholic agencies to pursue:

- Universal human rights
- Social and economic development
- Solidarity with the entire human family
- A world order based on nonviolent response to conflict

### **Endnotes**

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