

Biblical Wisdom as Foundation for Human Growth and National Greatness: A Paradigm for Post-Centenary Nigeria.

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Abstract

Wisdom is an accredited means to a successful and happy life both on the individual and community level. This essay examines how biblical wisdom can be appropriated in the search for personal growth and national greatness. The topic is chosen as an apt reflection to mark the centenary celebration of the unification of Northern and Southern Nigeria as a single nation (1914-2014). The discourse aims to be a contribution to the current debate on the best ways to chart a new path to national greatness. Both Nigeria and Africa are faced with many developmental challenges, and most of these call for new ways of thinking and acting. As a matter of fact, biblical wisdom addresses most aspects of human experience as wisdom itself is based on creation. This opens it up to wide areas of practical life in the contemporary society. The essay first sees the whole Bible as a material for wisdom teaching and then goes on to identify specific areas of Scripture that address the issues under discussion. Most of these are within the part of the Bible called the wisdom literature. All these are brought to bear on the Nigerian situation as challenges for future growth.

1. Introduction

Wisdom is a power that many people are searching for even when they are not really aware of it. The celebration of Nigeria's hundred years as a united country (1914-2014) has continued to provoke many questions on how to move forward as a great and united nation. While one can point to some positive achievements of these hundred years as a nation, the general perception among Nigerians is that most of the years have been marked by wasted opportunities. The discussion today, thus, borders on how to make use of the present opportunities to build a more successful nation and a more fulfilling and progressive society. The whole discussion can be summarized as a search for a wiser use of opportunities. The human search

for knowledge has always been propelled by the thirst for the art or power to live harmoniously with the world. This art is generally regarded as wisdom. It manifests itself in different forms but it gives one the power and required skills to live successfully in specific contexts. In a special way, biblical wisdom is oriented towards successful and happy living in every human context.

Wisdom is a term that is very much spoken of but often not very much reflected upon. In comparison with other areas of Christian thought, very little has been written on wisdom. Thus, some critics speak of the marginalization of wisdom in Christian theology (Bartholomew & O'Dowd, 2011). Yet wisdom remains at the very centre of the Christian life. The word of God is actually oriented towards the acquisition of wisdom, and because of this, the word of God remains fundamental in every form of training and human development. The present essay, thus, examines the role of biblical wisdom in personal and national development. It begins with an examination of the meaning of wisdom and goes on to explain the means of wisdom acquisition and the values of wisdom in human life in the light of relevant sections of the biblical text. The essay finally brings the reflection to bear on the Nigerian situation.

2. Meaning of Wisdom

Wisdom is a term very frequently used but often difficult to define with precision, especially when it comes to distinguishing it from knowledge. Ordinarily, people consider wisdom as the power of good judgement in a given situation. Also, the wise person is regarded as a knowledgeable person, one who possesses a special skill and can instruct others since he or she knows what life means and how it should be lived. From the biblical perspective, the English word "wisdom" is used to translate a number of related ideas in the Hebrew Bible, but the most basic is the root *hkm*, with its nominal form *hokmah* and verbal form *hakam*. Many analysts trace its link with the original Akkadian verb *hakamu* which means, "to know, understand, inform, explain". In the Hebrew usage, the noun *hokmah* has the sense of "superior mental ability or special skill" (Scott, 1971: 6), while the verb *hkm* means basically "to be or become wise, gain wisdom". The Hebrew adjective *hakam*, according to Gerhard von Rad (1972) describes one who could be said to be in some sphere "competent", "skilled". It describes one who knows how to reach a desired goal. In this sense, it can be used not only of the scholar but also of manual workers or sailors (von Rad, 1972: 20). The woman of substance in Prov 31:10-31 is said to be very wise

because she is very competent in home management, hence she is regarded as an ideal housewife. She is very skillful in her role as a house wife and demonstrates how a wise person can rule his or her world by being competent, possessing a good measure of self-worth and dignity.

Generally, the Bible sees wisdom as something to be acquired, and this is achieved through experience and learning. The specific realm of wisdom is the experienced world. The basic question that wisdom poses has to do with how one relates to the world. What do we make of the actual world of experience? The scholarly descriptions of wisdom all gravitate around this basic idea of designing a principle for the human relationship with the world. Norman Gottwald (1985) underscores this feature when he says, "Wisdom typifies a way of viewing the world based on close observation and careful reflection in an effort to discern the substantial harmony and order that is sensed to be constitutive of it" (p. 566). This is why wise people make effective use of their opportunities as they are ever attentive to elements and factors constituting their world of experience. According to Gottwald, "Wisdom aims for a practical and comprehensive ethic and behavioural style adequate to the situations in which its followers live, labor, and interact with one another and with others who are less attentive to wisdom" (p. 566). What this means is that wisdom inclines people to relate better with the environment and with fellow human beings within the environment. Where wisdom is lacking, the result is disorder, general recklessness in relationships, leading to the abuse of people and the environment with its attendant tensions and conflicts.

3. Wisdom as Knowledge of the Word or Logos

In the Hebrew context, wisdom is acquired through reflection on the works of creation and through the knowledge (da'at) of the revealed word of God (the *dāḇār* of God). But as creation becomes also identified as a medium of God's word (*dāḇār*), the wisdom from creation comes gradually to be identified as wisdom derived from the word of God in creation. This later dimension has been clarified by the later development of creation theology, especially in the writings of Claus Westermann (see Westermann: 1974; 1978; Perdue, 1994:25-26). According to von Rad (1975), the development of Israelite wisdom passed through two stages. The first stage was characterized by the derivation of wisdom from experience. At this stage, wisdom was known as "a practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world, based upon experience" (1975:418). The goal of the wise person was the mastering of life by the adherence to maxims that were "an art for living"

or a “technique for life” (von Rad, 1975: 421; Perdue, 1994: 24). The second stage, according to von Rad, was characterized by theological wisdom, and this was developed during the post-exilic period. Wisdom is now seen as a divine call to human beings, a mediator of divine revelation, the divine principle within creation (von Rad: 1975: 441-444; Perdue, 1994: 24). It is considered as a divine gift given to humans. Ben Sira identifies this wisdom with Torah (the law). The call to wisdom is thus seen as God's call to people to understand his revelation in creation. In Sir 24:3-21, wisdom is personified as an emanation of God's mouth, who, as the divine word, has reigned over the whole universe and finally established herself in Jacob, more precisely, on the temple in Zion-Jerusalem and among the people of Israel. The book of Wisdom, similarly, presents wisdom as God's presence in the world and the inspiration and guide of prophets and God's friends. It is the guiding principle of Israel's saving history.

In this way, Hebrew thought provides two basic contexts for wisdom acquisition: the works of creation and the revealed word of God. In the final analysis, every form of wisdom becomes associated with the word of God. Thus, the word of God becomes the basis for genuine acquisition of wisdom. In this regard, wisdom is acquired through listening to God in diverse situations and listening to created things. Here, the term listening implies attentiveness, diligence, reflection, discernment and obedience. The biblical text presents numerous examples of how people and situations got transformed through the wisdom acquired through this attentive listening to the word of God.

The understanding that wisdom is acquired through knowledge of the word of God is a feature of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The idea gets further developed in the New Testament as Jesus comes to be understood as the *logos* which itself is identified as God. This is most developed in the prologue of John's Gospel where the *logos* is identified as God and Jesus Christ as the Incarnation of the *logos* (John 1:1-18; cf. 1 John 1:1-4). The text contains the motif of wisdom as the *logos* is seen as the light that shines in the darkness and enlightens everyone (John 1:4-9). The point is that the acquisition of wisdom now is through relationship with the Person of Jesus who is considered as the wisdom (*sophia*) of God (1 Cor 1:24). A reading of the New Testament through the optic of wisdom shows that most of Jesus' teachings in the Gospels belong to the genre of wisdom. However, the title of Jesus as wisdom is not very much developed in contemporary

theology, but Origen considers it as the most ancient of all the titles attributed to Jesus in the Gospels (Origen, Commentary on John 1:109-124; see Wilken: 1975).

In the Greek context, the acquisition of wisdom, called *sophia*, comes through the knowledge of the *logos*, conceived as the rational principle that explains the order of the universe. What this means is that through wisdom, which is the knowledge of the *logos*, one comes to understand the order of created things. The acquisition of wisdom, thus, becomes the great empowerment that enables one to transform the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that the love (*philos*) of wisdom (*sophia*), which is “philosophy”, became a central feature in Greek thought. Heraclitus, who first highlighted the significance of the *logos*, admonished his people: “listen not to me but to the *logos*” (Guthrie, 1960: 45). Socrates drew the attention of his contemporaries to the fact that the unexamined life was not worth living, and by this he was actually telling them to acquire wisdom, to become conscious of their basic ignorance of the principle of order in their very existence. For Socrates, authentic existence begins from self-knowledge and self-redefinition, hence the dictum, “Man, know thyself.” Ironically, and tragically too, Socrates was murdered by his own people because they accused him of corrupting the youth when in actual fact he was empowering the youth with the very wisdom that would have transformed their lives. Most of the time, the basic ignorance that wisdom is what is needed to transform the world has led human beings to search gropingly for solutions that end up distorting the world.

4. Wisdom as the Art of Successful Living

The biblical text lays a lot of emphasis on the virtue of wisdom as it provides the necessary ingredients for successful living. In this, every part of the Bible can be used profitably for wisdom learning. This is what is meant in the Pauline text of 2 Tim 3:16: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” The legal and prophetic books (mainly the Pentateuch, the Former and Later Prophets) put much emphasis on the word of God in the acquisition of wisdom while the books of wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon) emphasize experience and reflection. While the early books of wisdom literature, such as Proverbs, Job and Qoheleth, are mostly characterized by a quasi philosophical approach to wisdom seeing its link with reflection on creation and experience, without however negating the theological dimension, the later books, such as Sirach

and Wisdom of Solomon, are more explicitly theological in their conception as they begin to associate wisdom with divine revelation which is given to special individuals and entities. In this way they come nearer to the ideas of the legal and prophetic books where the word of God is specifically the instrument of instruction and guidance in life. Some instances may clarify how these texts approach the theme of wisdom.

The law of Moses is presented in many parts of Bible as the effective means of acquiring wisdom. In Deut 4:6, the Israelites are enjoined to observe the law (torah) as this will make them a wise nation: "You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!'" This dimension of the Torah as a medium of wisdom finds further expression in Deut 8 where YHWH is presented as Israel's teacher (8:2-3), with the accent that his commandments provide the essential ingredients for successful life in the promised land and for wisdom necessary to weather through the trials of life. "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (8:3). In all these, YHWH is presented as one who loves his people but also disciplines them as a man disciplines his children (8:5). What can be gleaned from this is that the Torah learning was the fundamental form of education for Israel's youth as it equipped them with the wisdom necessary for successful living.

The wisdom literature, specifically, expresses how one becomes successful through the acquisition of wisdom. Wisdom is seen as something to be acquired (Prov 4:5-7), and it is mostly acquired through the following ways: fear of God (Prov 1:7), obedient listening (Prov 8:33; 19:20; 23:19), experience (Sir 39:8-13) and association with the wise (Prov 9:9; 13:20; 21:11). All these ways show that wisdom, once acquired, enables one to pass through the complex realities of life successfully. Wise people may be rich or poor, weak or strong, but their distinguishing mark is that they take mastery of every situation. They know how to react in adversity as well as in prosperity. This is why wise people have a particular passion for maxims or proverbs, as these enable them to respond wisely to diverse situations. As some authors (Bartholomew & O'Dowd, 2011) put it, "Not only are proverbs necessary for day-to-day conversation; but they also communicate the very basic sense we need to orient our lives in a constantly changing world" (p. 77).

The book of Proverbs is particularly significant in its rich trove of traditional maxims. The book assembles the relevant wise sayings that reflect the understanding of life within its social and historical context. The very purpose of the book is presented in Prov 1:2 as the acquisition of wisdom which consists in knowing and understanding words of wisdom. This acquisition of wisdom is further elaborated in vv. 3-4 as consisting of “acquiring a disciplined insight, uprightness, justice and fair dealing; for teaching sound judgement to the simple, and knowledge and reflection to the young.” The mention, here, of the two groups, the simple (*peti*), the young or youth (*na'ar*), is very significant. The term simple (*peti*) is used fourteen times in Proverbs, and it refers to the unlearned, the inexperienced, untaught, unskilled, one in need of instruction, prone to being easily seduced (Clifford, 1998: 46). The second term youth (*na'ar*) refers generally to the maturing young person who is in need of being taught and who is easily prone to being seduced. Here, the simple and the youth are very closely related and can sometimes refer to the same social category, namely, those in the process of being taught. The book of Proverbs calls on the youth to abandon the simplistic ways of living and become more sophisticated. The book also calls on those who are no longer young to increase their stock of wisdom. It is only through sophistication that one can successfully pick one's way through life which remains very complex.

The questions emanating from wisdom search for meaning out of the daily experiences of life. Consequently, wisdom enables one to interpret life meaningfully and make the best of one's environment. In this the greatest weapon is the fear of God. The sages all agree that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; Sir 1:14). This expression, which appears in different forms in many texts, has been interpreted by von Rad (1972) in the following words:

The fear of God not only enabled a man to acquire knowledge, but also had a predominantly critical function in that it kept awake in the person acquiring the knowledge the awareness that his intellect was directed towards a world in which mystery predominated. This fear of God has trained him to openness, to readiness for an encounter even with the inscrutable and the imponderable, that is, it has taught him that the sphere in which definite, verifiable orders can be discerned is a very limited one (p. 108-109).

What von Rad is saying here is that effective knowledge about God inclines a person towards a right relationship with the objects of his perception (see Murphy: 1998).

The book of Proverbs presents wisdom as an inner endowment that inclines one to exhibit competence and character in every situation. According to Prov 3:13-18,

Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding,
for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare
with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and
honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast
are called happy.

In this part of Proverbs (chapters 1-9), wisdom is cast in the imagery of a beautiful woman whom one craves for as a companion of life and through whom one desires to live happily and prosperously. This woman is often referred to as Lady Wisdom and she is often contrasted with Lady Folly who is the imagery of foolishness and waywardness. While lady wisdom leads one to a happy life, lady folly leads to a miserable and unhappy life.

5. Wisdom as Guide in the Face of Suffering

In some aspects of the wisdom literature, the emphasis is on the problem of suffering and the human response to it. This is a special province of the book of Job which raises many questions on the suffering of the innocent and the question of injustice in the world. The book presents the wise person as one who, like Job, manages situations of wealth and misery with character and equanimity. Reading Job is like entering into dialogue with the deepest human preoccupations and doubts. The book does not dabble into simplistic solutions that tend to see the wise person only as one who knows how to avoid suffering and misfortune. Rather, it teaches that suffering or misfortune is the lot of all humanity while the difference lies in what one makes of the situation. The wise person interprets situations better and consequently responds better.

Job presents a perfect picture of one searching for meaning in an apparently meaningless and absurd situation. The book, as Leo Perdue (1994) says, "explores, not moral virtue exemplified in the behaviour of one who at first

is unbelievably pious, but the moral and function of being human in a narrative world of the struggle with evil" (p. 129). The complex narrative tells how a man, considered rich and very good by all standards, is instantly made to suffer the loss of all his possessions: his wealth, his children, his health, and becomes reduced to the extremes of pain and misery. What does a normal person do in such a situation? This is the challenge that the book presents without offering definitive answers.

Job's wife volunteers a response to the situation: "Why persist in your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). But Job rebukes his wife and takes the part of a philosophical response: "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. If we take good things from God shall we not take the bad too?" (Job 2:10). The response proposed by Job's wife is the option of blasphemy, apostasy and suicide. Although the text does not say much about the wife of Job, she is also a victim of the tragedy that befell the family. No woman after losing all her children and possessions will remain a passive spectator. She is suffering with Job, her husband. Her words are not the words of an idle spectator. She is deeply involved in the miserable and the apparently meaningless situation. She recognizes her husband's integrity. Her response appears as a veiled critique of God's passivity: "Why persist in your integrity? Curse God and die!" Her error consists in the fact that she, unwittingly, takes the part of Satan in the narrative, as she echoes his words in 1:11 and 2:5 (see Whybray: 2008) where Satan insinuates that Job would curse God in the face of adversity. Satan's argument is that Job does not worship God for nothing, insinuating also that there is no pure religion, that every form of piety is based on some materialistic interest. The reader, thus, wonders if Job will prove Satan right, if he will take the suggested option of blasphemy, apostasy and suicide in the face of adversity? Unfortunately, many people in the face of adversity take to such option. This is on the increase in the contemporary modern world, as people get more and more frustrated in a society that does not seem to offer them fulfilment. Job rightly describes such option as the option of fools.

Job's own philosophical response may, on the face value, appear as a fatalistic approach to life, but it is more realistic as one cannot but accept a situation that one cannot change. However, Job's responses in the later part of the story show that he is neither fatalistic nor passive in the face of misery. He is seen wrestling with interpretations of the situation and troubled by the fact that no answer rhymes with the logic of his own integrity. He goes to the

extent of questioning the rationale for his continued existence (Job 3), accuses God of undue hostility against him and divine complicity in the situation of injustice (Job 9-10), and challenges God to accuse him of any single wrongdoing (Job 31). But despite all these, Job does not take his own life and never gives up his strong faith in God. While the book remains very complex in its presentation of Job's character, the responses in the dialogues reflect the diverse human perplexities and groping questions in the face of adversity.

6. Success through Wise Approach to the Changing World

Wise people through the ages have confronted the hard reality of changeability of things in creation. The author of the book of Qoheleth makes it his primary concern and gives many lessons on how to live wisely in a changing world. The book addresses the absurdity of life itself raising the question of how best to live in a world that appears to offer no lasting value. The author may appear as a pessimist if one does not properly follow the rhetorical complexity of his argumentation. In fact, modern scholars are divided on the point whether to call him an advocate of melancholy or a preacher of joy.

Many readers of Qoheleth have come to associate the book with the catch phrase: "vanity upon vanities, all is vanity". The question is, does the author of Qoheleth really consider everything as vanity? The understanding of the word "vanity" in English and modern languages connotes the sense of futility and emptiness. The Hebrew word used in Qoheleth is *hebel* which actually means breath, wind, vapour. It does not mean "vanity" in the Hebrew context. The rendering of *hebel* as "vanity" is taken from the Greek translation, the Septuagint (LXX) and the later Latin translation of the Hebrew original. Modern scholarship considers this rendering as inadequate. This means that the author of Qoheleth does not really regard everything as vanity. He is not denying the sense of reality. He is not a nihilist, as many have taken him to be. What he means in the use of *hebel* is that everything is passing away like the wind or breath or vapour, that is, everything is transitory, ephemeral and often absurd. Qoheleth, however, does not remain completely negative. For him, despite the transitory nature of things, there are two things which are of lasting value: the fear of God and the joy of living. He encourages all to be wise enough to enjoy the good things of life (2:24-25; 3:12-13,22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:8), since the opportunities of joy are the little consolations which the Creator in his goodness offers to suffering humanity. Qoheleth is, thus, regarded as a

preacher of joy, in spite of his apparent negation of values. Victor Onwukeme summarizes Qoheleth's message on this point thus: "Life will have its good times and its bad times, and it is full of uncertainties. But one thing is certain: you will only make it worse for yourself if you do not cultivate an attitude of contentment with those simple joys of life" (p. 45).

It is the reality of death that haunts the author in the whole argument of the book and to this oppressive reality he brings in joy as a palliative, a soothing remedy. Since human life is a gift from God and the same life is doomed to dissolution in death, the best one can do is to accept the given life with joy. The only time one has is the time in which one lives, and after this everything returns to dust. Qoheleth considers this fact and, thus, enjoins young people to enjoy their youth (Qoh 11:7-10). The taste of death already begins with the coming of old age as one's powers begin to diminish and consequently the degree of enjoyment decreases. Qoheleth encourages the young person to profit from the immense opportunities of the youthful age because it is a period that offers great joys that will no longer be experienced as the period of old age sets in. But this does not mean acting unscrupulously in the pursuit of pleasure. He advises the young person to act with prudence and avoid anything that will bring affliction to the body and danger to health. Of course, real pleasure requires good health. To all these the author advises the youth never to forget God whose judgment will come (11:7). However, the nature of this judgment is not clearly explained. Many scholars are of the view that the judgment meant here is not the so-called judgment after death but a judgment that will come during the course of the individual's earthly life. The judgment will centre on how one has used the life and the youthful age given by God.

7. The Place of Wisdom in Nigeria's Post-Centenary Era

The different aspects of biblical wisdom all gravitate around the acquisition of the art for successful and happy living. The conviction is that the one who acquires wisdom possesses the art of achieving success in every new situation of life as such a one knows how to maximize the opportunities present or latent in every situation. Wisdom inclines one to listen more attentively to creation and history, but with lack of wisdom one tends to squander every opportunity. This makes wisdom a great asset to every aspect of the human relationship with the world. From this understanding of the role of wisdom, one can relate it to Nigeria from two broad perspectives: 1. the Insufficient use of wisdom in national development in the last hundred years, seen especially in the improper use of the nation's opportunities; 2. the challenges of wisdom for the post-centenary era.

7.1 Insufficient Use of Wisdom in National Development in the Last Hundred Years

Most evaluations of Nigeria's hundred years as a nation are negative portraits. This is understandable given the quantum of wasted opportunities and wasted lives. One notes, however, that the first part of the hundred years were years under British colonial bondage. The Nigerian state was born as a colonial entity and existed mostly for colonial interests. Suffice it to say that until independence in 1960, the mode of Nigeria's growth was mostly dependent on policies dictated by the whims and caprices of the colonial masters. Incidentally, the years from 1960 to date have been mostly very turbulent years during which the nation squandered most of the opportunities from its human and natural resources. The consequence is that, while one can point to some pockets of development, the general picture is that of a nation that has performed grossly below average.

This negative evaluation is underscored by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in their Joint Pastoral Letter, *Growing a New Nigeria*, issued in March 2011, to mark Nigeria's fiftieth independence anniversary (1960-2010): "Unfortunately, the initial hope and enthusiasm of that first independence day slowly began to give way to apprehension, despair and dissension as religious and ethnic cleavages were being highlighted, aggravated and exploited to satisfy the selfish interests of a few. Thereafter, the interest of authentic development began to suffer" (CBCN, 2011: no. 11). These unwise approaches to national development coalesced to bring about the crises of coups, military regimes and civil war. All these brought the nation to its knees despite the abundance of natural and human resources. As the Catholic Bishops further say,

Massive violation of fundamental human rights during the years of military rule, from 1966 to 1979, and from 1983 to 1999, represents a period of darkness in the history of Nigeria. In the darkness of repression visited on the nation by military rule, Nigerians were like a people who had gambled away that freedom gained on October 1, 1960. The violation of fundamental human rights constituted a big impediment to authentic development (CBCN, 2011: no. 11).

The failure of governance in Nigeria, as articulated above, can be summarized as failure in the management of resources and failure in

human relations, given the massive violations of human rights and rampant injustice. As can be seen, the CBCN document singles out the military rules for the greater share of the nation's malaise, but one can hardly exculpate the civilian leaderships of 1979-1983 and 1999 to 2014. All these have contributed in major ways to the current poor state of the nation.

Nigeria's development, during these years, has been frustrated by what appears as a chronic managerial incompetence and lack of the rule of law. The situation is, however, not peculiar to Nigeria but applies to most African nations. This fact provokes reflection on the relationship between politics and wisdom. As some authors argue, "Law establishes the principles by which a society is to be run, but in practice politics requires wisdom in dealing with specific situations" (Bartholomew & O'Dowd, 2011: 305). Wisdom enables people to master every situation of life. This is the point of biblical wisdom. The wisdom texts help for the organization of life on the political level as they highlight the character of good administration. Wisdom makes possible the distinction between the authentic values that promote life and the contrary values that lead to death. The smooth running of the human society is anchored on the acquisition of wisdom. The book of Proverbs expresses it aptly in the words of personified wisdom (Lady Wisdom): "I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight, I have strength. By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just. By me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly" (Prov 8:14-16). The point of this text is that without wisdom, a society hardly develops as it lacks the art to manage its resources.

It is this lack of proper use of wisdom that explains why Nigeria is in the class of the world's highest producers of mineral resources, including oil, but still ranks miserably among the nations with the highest index of poverty and misery. It is lack of wisdom that explains why Nigeria parades a host of world class intellectuals and experts in diverse fields of human development and yet remains below the development index. Foreigners usually marvel at the immense agricultural and mineral resources of Nigeria in spite of which the society has remained scandalously miserable and beggarly. In the last periodic rating of governance in Africa, undertaken by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation in 2012, Nigeria was ranked among the last ten countries in Africa with the lowest performance index, and with the miserable score of 11 where the highest possible score was 100 (The Economist, 29 July: 2013). Mo Ibrahim, a wealthy Sudanese-born British

Media magnate, established the Foundation to reward good leadership in Africa. Out of 52 African countries ranked, Nigeria was 43rd, which is worse than her 40th position in the 2010 ranking. How does one explain this downward trend in governance rating? A number of factors can be adduced but the underlying factor is the insufficient application of wisdom, which is the lack of competence to manage the nation's immense human and natural resources.

Another symptom of the nation's deficiency in wisdom is in the character of the citizenry. Indiscipline and corruption have continued to be attributed to Nigerians as second nature. The increasing rate of indiscipline and corruption in almost all sectors of the nation's life is a clear proof of the nation's dire need for a wisdom oriented education in all sectors. The wisdom texts of the Bible present discipline (*mûsar*) as an essential quality of wisdom while lack of wisdom is a mark of folly (Job 5:17; Prov 12:1; 15:5). The acquisition of discipline is posited as one of the main aims of the book of Proverbs: "for learning what wisdom and discipline are, for understanding words of deep meaning, for acquiring a disciplined insight, uprightness, justice and fair dealing; for teaching sound judgement to the simple, and knowledge and reflection to the young (Prov 1:2-4). The biblical understanding of discipline often refers to training or education oriented towards inculcating "within the individual a moral order in which knowledge, character and righteous conduct would achieve integration" (Perdue, 1994: 73). The lack of discipline leads to all forms of corrupt practices and the lack of righteousness in social dealings. This has its disastrous consequences, as can be seen in the heightened scourge of corruption in the Nigerian society and allied evils. According to Proverbs, "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov 14:34). The virtue of righteousness (*sedeq* in Hebrew) is a fruit of wisdom while the term referred to as sin (*hata't*) emanates from foolishness which is the contrary of wisdom. This virtue should have been in abundance in Nigeria given the nation's reputation for being hyper-religious. However, critics have often pointed out that this trumpeted piety is often based on a certain concept of God that encourages a materialistic approach to religion. God is often used as a means to solve life problems, and sometimes he is manipulated in corrupt and obnoxious ways for materialistic solutions. Surely, the abuse of religion frustrates the growth in wisdom as the Bible locates the foundation of wisdom in the genuine fear of the Lord, which is genuine spirituality. Materialism is a symptom of the lack of wisdom, and it

is the foundation of many social evils. This explains most of Nigeria's social and ethical problems.

7.2 The Challenges of Wisdom for the Post-Centenary Era

The great challenge today is on what to make of life in the current post-centenary era in Nigeria. Almost all other African countries have the same challenges. Naturally, as the society today becomes more and more complex, most people are preoccupied with the questions of meaning and how to make their lives happier and more worth-living. This has brought about challenges in new forms of individualism, increasing corruption, conflicts of interests and dangerous forms of violence. Theophilus Okere (2013) describes the situation as a “vicious circle of ignorance, poverty and corruption” (p. 47). As he laments,

Even though they work so hard they still remain so poor, and being poor, they cannot long resist the temptation to corruption. But it is this rampant corruption that leads to non performance by corrupt officials, to un-governability and lawlessness, to criminality, to chaos and back full circle to that endemic poverty which was the *primum movens*. And our dilemma is this: how can you begin to cure a people who are corrupt because they are poor and poor because they are corrupt?” (p. 47)

These are issues that call for heightened wisdom approach. According to Okere (2013), the masses need “the therapy of information and enlightenment, of awareness creation and a conscientization that is apt to heal them from their stupor and lethargy. They need the therapy of the discipline that postpones immediate satisfaction from petty bribes and the patience that can await long term, real development results” (p. 47). This implies the cultivation of a more realistic approach to things, a new philosophy and a new theology of development.

From the cursory reflection on biblical wisdom, it is seen that wisdom, above all, teaches people how to live life in a complex world. It teaches them to search for a hidden meaning in every situation and, thus, never to give up hope in the struggle for meaningful existence. The book of Job, particularly, teaches a patient reasoning into the crisis of living. In the current state of insecurity in Nigeria and other forms of personal and social frustration, there is need for wise interpretations that dissuade people from giving in to irrational solutions or to despondency and depression. This is a way of

saying that the country needs greater commitment to wisdom learning.

Wisdom teaching is a great intellectual apostolate that helps people to think better, to act better, to become better developed as human persons, to acquire greater mastery of life in their environment and to maximize their opportunities and potentialities. The wise person does not give in to pessimism or hopelessness but searches for ways to make the best of every opportunity. It is this type of wisdom that Nigeria and her citizens need at this critical moment of her history. The challenges in the educational sector today require a wisdom-based reform programme that will anchor the educational system on a holistic formation that equips the human person to become a competent and effective agent of transformation within the given environment.

8. Conclusion

This essay has been a reflection on how biblical wisdom can help people on both individual and collective levels to find greater meaning in their lives and live more successfully and happily. The essay takes into consideration the challenges confronting the Nigerian society after hundred years of existence as a nation. One of the identified problems of Nigeria is in the area of proper use of resources, and the common perception is that there is an insufficient use of wisdom in the utilization of the immense resources of the nation. This has brought about many social and national problems. The situation report is that of a nation that has not lived very much up to expectations. The prevailing challenges are capable of inclining people to despondency, but it is argued that a wiser approach to issues can turn the individual and society around for better. Some biblical texts and passages have been highlighted as points of reference as well as sources of inspiration in facing contemporary challenges both on the personal and collective levels. The essay argues that a rediscovery of biblical wisdom, together with its concomitant moral conversion, is a sure path to personal and national self-rediscovery and renaissance.

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