

VIRTUE ETHICS AND THE REMAKING OF NIGERIAN NATION

Rev. Fr. Ibe Chiwuba Anthony, PhD
 Department of Philosophy
 Imo State University Owerri
 ibeanthony@imsuonline.edu.ng, iberia202001@yahoo.com,
 Tel. 07032520145

Chidimma S. Ikea, PhD
 Department of Philosophy
 Imo State University Owerri
 chidimmaikea@imsu.edu.ng; Tel. 08037909065

Abstract

In Nigeria today, there exist exclusionary cohesions that are in opposition to other social groups with different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. These function solely to reinforce oppressive power relationships, where participating communities are seen as unequals. This attitude has created ethnic chauvinism in Nigeria, where each rightly or wrongly claims one superiority or the other over all others: The Hausa/Fulani claim that political power belongs to them as the majority tribe born to rule. The Igbo ethnic group claims to be the most educated and intelligent. The Yoruba tribe claims that they are the economic (hub) power of the nation. The antagonism is also the case with multi-religious creeds in Nigeria. Each religion claims superiority over the other. This has always resulted in their vilifying one another to the point of causing blood violence in the country. Ordinarily, one would think that this diversity of gifts and claims in a country like Nigeria would have been harnessed for a better collaboration to achieve "Unity in Diversity". This, however, has never been the case. Nigerians cannot really claim that they are one in a way that all the ethnic groups would be happy to confess and profess "Nigeria we hail thee, though tribes and tongues may differ, in brotherhood we stand". This paper proposes the cultivation and practice of the virtues of tolerance and unity in diversity, so that the differences in caste, creed and ethnic groups cannot keep us apart; rather they are gifts in varieties to build a better Nigeria.

Keywords: Virtue Ethics, Education, Nigeria, Rights, Ethnic Group, Social Group

Introduction

Nigeria is a diverse country with an estimated population of 144 million. She has about 250 to 450 ethno-linguistic groups, with different cultural and religious, geographical and political backgrounds. Of these numerous ethnic groups, there are three major groups – the Hausa in the Northern region, the Igbo in the Eastern region and the Yoruba in the Western region. Other minority ethnic groups include: the Kanuri, Tiv, Bini, Isoko, Nupe, Ibibio, Jukan, Gwari, Igbira, etc¹. The U.S. Government 2018 survey estimated that the Christians in Nigeria cover about 49.3% of the population, the Muslims are about 48.8%, while the remaining 2 percent belongs to other or no religions². Nigeria as a country is blessed in all aspects with enormous human, natural

¹ D., Olagunju, Of Nigeria's major ethnic groups. Geopolitical zones, in Nigerian Tribune. October 30, 2017; cf. (Wikipedia, 2011).

² Office of the International Religious Freedom, @18 Report on International Religious Freedom: Nigeria, <https://www.state.gov/nig-report>. 2012

and economic resources. All these should be added boosts for Nigeria to be fittingly called the “Giant of Africa”. Instead ethnic and religious intolerance has defied all efforts to make Nigeria a flourishing nation.

Ethnicity - where you come from matters much in Nigeria. There have been cases of xenophobia of many tribes on others. One non negligible instance is the civil (Nigerian-Biafran) war that lasted tragically for about three years –1967 to 1970. Most Nigerians believe that the war targeted a particular ethnic group in Nigeria. Still today in Nigeria, evidences of tribal discriminations abound in the lack of federal character in federal appointments, recruitments and distribution of resources. These have caused feelings of indignation among the discriminated ethnic groups. Presently, there are more than ten self-determination groups agitating for liberation from Nigeria. Some of these are: The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Oduduwa People's liberation Front, the Arewa People's Front. Other groups include: The Niger Delta Group, the Middle Belt and many others demanding for self governance. In addition, there are many militant groups fighting against one unjust structure or the other in the present Nigeria.

Religious affiliation also plays a difference in Nigeria. It has been investigated and found that Nigeria is the country with the world's largest Christian deaths for the year 2021 with the number of 5,191 deaths. From July 2009 (with rise of Boko Haram) to March 2022, the Christian death rose to 45,644³. These killings were as a result of religious intolerance. Nigerians and their leaders at every instance, mobilize ethno-religious sentiments in order to gain or retain relevance or positions of power. Virtually nothing could be done in Nigeria, (political elections, appointments, allocation of resources, etc.) without ethnic or religious bias, partiality and unfairness. Such chauvinism has continued to divide Nigeria. It violates the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which insists on “National integration as the pivot of our existence as a nation. Consequently, people today reject any form of Muslim-Muslim/Christian-Christian (same faith) tickets and also recycling people of the same tribe for the presidential and vice presidential offices and other key positions in Nigerian politics.

Ethnic and religious intolerance is the root of insecurity, industrial and political unrest, instability and tyranny in Nigeria. Either in rebellion or as a leeway, terrorism, armed robbery, killer herdsmen, kidnapping, jihadist threats, election misconducts, etc., became the bane of Nigerians. Corruption of all sorts has stained the image of Nigeria as a country. As a consequence, economic growth and development in Nigeria have reduced to a zero coefficient. Nigeria is at the brink of collapse. The colossal challenge of Nigeria today is how to manage her diverse political, multi ethnic and religious plurality. Many world leaders have expressed doubts on any remedy to the Nigerian situation. Many religious leaders have also given their prophecies for the end and breaking of Nigeria as a nation⁴. The Nigerian problem is enormous that no one approach can solve the malady, yet it is not insurmountable. This paper proposes as a solution a right

³ Genocide Watch, Nigeria is worst in the World for persecution of Christians in 2020. Intersociety, May 4, 2022.

⁴ **The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Section 15, sub section 1.**

approach to attitudinal change by Nigerian individual citizens, the government and more importantly collectively⁵. This attitudinal change is only possible through the cultivation and the practice of the virtues of tolerance and unity in diversity.

What is Virtue?

Virtue means arete, a Greek word which signifies excellence. Conventionally, virtue is defined as a stable disposition to do good. It means to act in ways respondent to the demands of right reason.⁶ Virtues are acquired and cultivated based on experience, practice, habit, mentorship, good education and good examples. According to Adams: “Character is built out of the ongoing series of decisions made every day that then shape the subsequent choices resulting in behavior, and virtue is a way to describe that character, understood as a collection of habitual actions⁷.” According to Aristotle, “The virtuous person perceives, feels and does the right things consistently at the right times, for the right reasons and in the right proportion, neither excessively nor deficiently” (Aristotle 1985, 44 [1106b21-29]). For Hursthouse, virtue is concerned 'with emotions and emotional reactions, choices, values, desires, perceptions, attitudes, interests, expectations and sensibilities. To possess a virtue is to be a certain sort of person with a certain complex mindset⁸. Thus, virtue is the habitus which improves or develops human personality in a way worthy of being human⁹. Virtue is a way of being.

According to the Aristotelian-Thomistic axiom “*Agere sequitur esse*” (action follows being or as a being is so it acts), our behaviours depend on how we are inside us – from the good or bad habits we have already acquired. In life, we choose a certain value instead of the other. For instance, we choose to be pacific, recognizing the value of peace, instead of being violent. When this disposition becomes strong in us (as our second nature), we know it is not worthy to accomplish violent acts both in the clandestine and in open life. This means that we are in a certain way because we became that way. We act in a certain way because we are in a certain way. This will mean that with actions we accomplish now, we are disposing ourselves to become in a way and this disposes us to accomplish again certain type of actions¹⁰. However, to accomplish a recognized good or to resist a recognized evil, there is the need of an interior force, a determination. This interior force is called virtue. Thus the term virtue (*Virtus*) from its Latin derivation *Vir*; means manly, force, strength. Virtue is therefore, the force, the motor of moral life. To be virtuous therefore, means acting and conducting one's life on a regular and stable basis in line with fundamental qualities of moral excellence.

⁵ O., Ipadeola, Qualitative Study on the Patterns, Experiences and Manifestations of Corruption in Nigeria, p. 3.

⁶ A.C., Ibe, Virtue Ethics, The Recourse to the Problem of Rectitude and Civility in Africa. Owerri, Nigeria, Uzopietro Publishing Company, 2017, p. 3.

⁷ P., Adams, Ethics with character: Virtues and the ethical social worker. Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare, 2009, p. 88, in S. B., Garlington,

⁸ M. E. Collins, et.al., An Ethical Foundation for Social Good: Virtue Theory and Solidarity. Article in Research on Social Work Practice, April 2019, DOI: 10.1177/1049731519839472.

⁹ R. Hursthouse, “Virtue Ethics.” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 2012, p. 1, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>.

¹⁰ S.R., Vanni Elementi di Filosofia III, Brescia, 1985, p. 189.

¹¹ A., Vendemiati, In prima persona: Lineamenti di etica generale. 2nd edition, Urban University Press, 2004, p. 89.

What is Virtue Ethics Theory?

Virtue ethics is one of the three main normative ethics. The other two are deontology and consequentialism. Deontology emphasizes rules and duties, which focuses its ethical judgment on (skill, knowledge) professional behavior of individuals, organizations and communities. Consequentialism emphasizes the beneficial outcomes of an action. The most common consequentialist theory is utilitarianism which focuses on the maximization of wellbeing¹¹.

Virtue ethics in contrast, measures competency in terms of being a good person. It judges the morality of human conduct by emphasizing the character of the acting agent and implications of professional behavior (whether of individuals, organizations, communities, etc.¹²), as it is expressed in, and influenced by, intention, desire, choice, strength of will, and caring and/or feeling for others.

The basic concept of virtue ethics is *eudemonia*, which means human wellbeing or flourishing. Good character in turn is seen as constitutive of human flourishing (Aristotle 1985, 44 (1106b15-1107a5), 19 (1098b20-25)). This can be achieved by cultivating personal and societal virtues, which will develop our excellencies in our behaviours, in our characters, in our dispositions in order to achieve our happiness as individuals and the well being of the society. Possessing the virtues is what makes one moral, because one's actions are a mere reflection of one's inner morality. Virtue ethics is about a way of being (as a being is so it acts). Sachs citing Plato and Aristotle, (the father founders of Virtue ethics theory), affirmed that good society depends on the virtues of the citizens. Likewise, when the government is virtuous, it helps to promote the behaviour of the individuals and vice versa.¹³

Virtue ethics theory is not new. Socrates and Aristotle enlisted virtues for a moral society. Kristjánsson noted that in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle proposes a theory of happiness (*eudaimonia*) – known as 'human flourishing' which is the ultimate good and ultimate end (*telos*) of human beings.¹⁴ Human flourishing is not mere contentment or pleasure. Irwin explains that: “In Aristotle's view, rational agents necessarily choose and deliberate with a view to their ultimate good, which is happiness; it is the ultimate end, since we want it for its own sake, and we want other things for its sake.”¹⁵ *Virtue ethics theory maintains that the human life has a purpose. This purpose is the state of “Eudaimonia”* which is, 'human flourishing', well-being', 'happiness', 'blessedness'. A virtue ethics approach entails an outlook that asks questions about what it means to live well. It considers what constitutes human flourishing or the good life. It asks how humans should live accordingly. Virtue ethics is a way of living¹⁶. In the modern period, Alistair McIntyre has studied virtues of a good society.¹⁷ According to MacIntyre, human flourishing entails human activity which includes our actions as well as our reasoning and our feelings, desires and impulses - that expresses excellence (virtue).¹⁸ Thus

¹¹ R., Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

R., Chamiec-Case, The contribution of virtue ethics to a richer understanding of social work competencies. *Social Work & Christianity*, 40, 2013pp. 251ff.

J., Sachs, Ethics in Action: Towards a New Virtue Ethics for Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Solutions Network, SDGacademy, www.sdgacademy.org.

K., Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, emotions, and education*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007, in K., Jordan, K., Kristjánsson, **Sustainability, virtue ethics, and the virtue of harmony with nature**, in *Environmental Education Research* on 09 March 2016, by Taylor & Francis at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2016.1157681>, p. 5.

T., Irwin, Introduction to *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed, by Aristotle, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999., pp. xiii-xxiv.

M., Bonnett, “Education for Sustainability as a Frame of Mind.” *Environmental Education Research* 2002. 8 (1), p. 12.

A., MacIntyre, *After virtue*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

A., MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*. 2nd ed. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, (1998) 2002, in K., Jordan, K., Kristjánsson, **Sustainability, virtue ethics, and the virtue of harmony with nature**, p. 5.

Kristjánsson argued that Aristotle's flourishing – *eudaimonia* is impossible to achieve without being morally good and without actualizing the moral virtues'.¹⁹

Characteristics of Virtue Ethics Theory

Virtue ethics is value oriented. Values are motivators that shape and guide people's thoughts, actions and attitudes in certain distinct ways.²⁰ Values function as standards for judging and justifying actions. Intrinsic values such as happiness, honesty, compassion, loyalty, forgiveness, justice, tolerance, equality, true friendship, etc., possess inherent worth that bear a strong resemblance to the virtues.²¹ Values play a role in creating sustainable citizens and it is often mentioned as a key aim in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) literatures.²² Virtue ethics is essentially and naturally developmental and educational in focus. For Socrates knowing what is good is the first step towards putting it into action, and for Aristotle it will not be put into action unless the agent has received sustained training in doing so (Aristotle 1985, 40 [1105b5-15]). Virtue ethics theory is about integral character education.²³ To be virtuous is an on-going endeavour. Character education in virtue ethics is precisely the way of *coming to be* a certain kind of person – within the constraints of one's personal and social situation.²⁴

Virtue ethics employs the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* (practical wisdom, prudence or good sense) to determine the 'golden mean' in particular circumstances. Such ability to learn from experience and to apply that experience in new and unique situations is an essential component of any education for nation building. Fluidity as another character of virtue ethics shows that the virtues can be applied in vastly diverse contexts. They are easily replicated to new areas of experience in diverse locations and times. Thus virtue ethics provides a framework to deal with a myriad of issues.

Virtues that promote Nation Building

In this section we shall discuss the virtues of tolerance and unity in diversity. While tolerance is related to *moral virtue of fortitude*, *unity in diversity is a civic virtue*. Both are indispensable in rebuilding the Nigerian nation. This is because at the root of the religious or ethnic hostility in Nigeria there is the lack of the virtue of tolerance and a poor appreciation of our diversity as a gift.

¹⁹ K., Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, emotions, and education*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007, p. 15, in K., Jordan, K., Kristjánsson, *Sustainability*, p. 5.

²⁰ S. H., Schwartz, J., Cieciuch, M., Vecchione, et. al., "Refining the Theory of Basic Individual Values." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2012, no.103 p.4; 663-688. doi: 10.1037/a0029393.

²¹ S.H., Schwartz, "Are There Universal Aspects in the Structure and Contents of Human Values?" *Journal of Social Issues* 50 (4) 1994, p. 21.

²² UNESCO, Progress on education for sustainable development, unescodoc.unesco.org, 2012-2016.

²³ D., Narvaez, "Natural Morality, Moral Natures and Human Flourishing." 2014, in B. Musschenga & A. van Harskamp, (eds.), *What Makes Us Moral? On the capacities and conditions for being moral*, 239-254, Heidelberg, Germany: Springer, 2014

²⁴ K., Jordan, K., Kristjánsson, *Sustainability, virtue ethics, and the virtue of harmony with nature, in Environmental Education*, p.6.

The Virtue of Tolerance

The word “tolerance” comes from the Latin word “*tolerare*”, which means “to bear” or “endure”. In the Oxford Dictionary of Languages, tolerance means the “ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviours that one dislikes or disagrees with”. The Cambridge Dictionary puts it as “ability to deal with something unpleasant or annoying or to continue existing despite bad and difficult conditions”. It entails bearing or putting up with a weight or a burden. Tolerance, therefore, is the disposition to endure or bear peoples' beliefs and practices that one finds either false or immoral.

Human beings by nature are inclined to intolerance. Man invests himself in the things he cares about. Those who disagree with us claim that what we care about is unworthy of care and, in so doing, they denigrate our investment and we do same to theirs, of course. Moral, religious and political disagreement is a threat precisely because the other, simply by virtue of being other, devalues our beliefs and practices. And we do the same thing when we believe or proclaim that the other person is wrong or immoral. Our natural impulse is to secure our own beliefs and practices against the perceived threat of alien beliefs and practices. The easiest way to do this of course is to dismiss those alien practices and beliefs by rejecting or otherwise distancing the *person* whose beliefs and practices they are.

While some beliefs and practices are not burdensome, (one's own beliefs and practices), there are clearly, for the tolerant person, some beliefs that are burdensome to practice or believe. To feel burdened by the beliefs and practices of others, we must first hold our own beliefs and practices against which others' beliefs and practices are judged. It is precisely because this person believes something that I believe is false or that person does something that I judge wrong, that I am in a position to tolerate such beliefs and practices. To tolerate another's preference, one must also care deeply about those differences. Tolerance requires, in addition to disagreement, an element of caring or deep commitment to the belief or practice in question. Tolerance is morally worthwhile because although the *beliefs* of the other are believed to be false, the tolerant person values the person who holds those beliefs.

Tolerance means to treat the other as intrinsically valuable in spite of the rejection of her beliefs and practices contrary to our own. Tolerance is the cultivated disposition to subdue our natural inclination to distance, reject or hold at arm's length others whose beliefs and practices differ from our own. In this way, the other person is recognized as a subject of inestimable worth. The tolerant person says, in effect, “Our fundamental disagreement does not diminish my estimation of your worth as a human being and, therefore, though I disagree with your beliefs or practices, still I will endure them”²⁵. Thus, valuing the other may not entail respecting the beliefs and practices we tolerate, even though one might both tolerate and respect them. For instance, one might not work up respect for the beliefs and practices of the terrorists and bandits. One may

²⁵ K.J., Clark, “The Good of Diversity and the Virtue of Tolerance, p. 5.

judge their attitudes so odious that he/she simply cannot accord them respect or admiration. However, the tolerant person will, while not respecting the beliefs and practices of the terrorists and bandits continue to value them as persons. The tolerant person will not, in other words, allow the disrespect she accords those beliefs to effect in her a corresponding devaluation of the persons who hold them. Were she to devalue the persons involved, tolerance would give way to intolerance and she might be inclined to treat the holders of opposing beliefs as sub-humans or mere animals. She might wish to eliminate their behaviour by either avoiding or exterminating them.

According to K.J. Clark, to tolerate means there is *disagreement*, which is a burden to bear. If there is no burden, there will be nothing to tolerate. It is the weight of *disagreement* that makes tolerance possible. The more the beliefs/practices touch fundamental human concerns, the more one is tempted towards intolerance. It is only when one is faced with a different belief/practice that the virtue of tolerance can be exercised and developed. Secondly, at the root of principle of tolerance lies the cultivated disposition to value others who disagree with us. One tolerates the beliefs/practices of others when he recognizes them as beliefs and practices of persons,²⁶ of intrinsic and inestimable worth. It is only such strong conception of persons that can comprehensibly ground that worth. Thus Clark concludes that: "It is a conception of persons as icons of God, divine image-bearers, objects of divine love, or some other suitably thick conception of persons, that can account for the intrinsic and inestimable worth of human beings"²⁷. For the Judeo-Christian-Muslim traditions, tolerance means to bear with the person who holds differing beliefs and practices of fundamental human concern. These traditions urge us to say, "I will resist the temptation to think of myself as better than you due to our differing beliefs and practices. I value you as a person, a divine image-bearer"²⁸.

Tolerance does not mean that we will not try to persuade the other of the error of his or her ways. After all, we believe them to be mistaken on matters of fundamental human concern. Here however, we must distinguish between two extreme situations of intolerance and indifference. The first extreme is the vice of intolerance which is the desire to denigrate, disenfranchise, torture or even kill those with whom we disagree. The other extreme is the vice of indifference. An indifferent person is the *de facto* moral relativist to whom every practice is acceptable. The indifferent person simply doesn't care very deeply about her own moral and religious commitments and those of others. Such a person cannot cultivate the virtue of tolerance. Only the person who believes a practice to be immoral or mistaken and cares deeply about such matters can be tolerant of the practice. The indifferent person cannot reasonably exercise tolerance toward the moral or religious absolutist because she lacks a commitment to a conception of the good or the true in contrast to which moral or religious absolutist beliefs are judged by her to be false or immoral. The indifferent person exhibits decisive lack of commitment to matters of fundamental human concern and, in so doing, betrays that part of her humanity which desperately desires the true and the good. While indifference on matters of morality and

²⁶ A human person is defined as "an individual substance of a rational nature by Boethius.

²⁷ K.J., Clark, "The Good of Diversity and the Virtue of Tolerance, p. 6.

²⁸ K.J., Clark, "The Good of Diversity and the Virtue of Tolerance, p. 6.

religion is an impoverished existence, intolerance encourages the tendency to attribute ignoble motives to those who differ from us. Tolerance then, is the mean between the excesses of indifference and intolerance. It is the cultivated disposition to resist our natural tendencies toward indifference and intolerance. It moderates our extreme disapproval of others. Given the fact of gross and widespread indifference and intolerance towards people of other tribes and religions in Nigeria, tolerance is a worthwhile virtue for a solution. Tolerance affirms our common humanity, common dignity, common frailty and situatedness. Genuinely valuing the other is a precondition of a flourishing, pluralistic society²⁹ like ours. Tolerance is also the precondition of genuine dialogue. Tolerance precisely disposes us to repair the human fabric torn by ethno-religious disagreement.

Limits to Tolerance

The question here is, should there be limits to tolerance beyond which come the intolerability and the impermissibility? According to Clark K.J., “We can value (say) a Hitler as an object of inestimable worth, a fellow image-bearer of the divine; we cannot tolerate his practice of human extermination and world domination. Although slave-owners are themselves created in the image of God, we cannot tolerate their ownership and mistreatment of slaves”³⁰. The ethical limits to tolerance is then obvious. “Harm to others is the natural limit to tolerance.”³¹ One cannot tolerate behaviour that harms other people. Acts of *physical, moral and social* harm to others clearly fall outside the benchmark of the tolerable and permissible. One can believe whatever he likes about members of other ethnic or religious groups but we will not let him lay a hand on those persons. A person may like to eat human flesh, but we will not tolerate cannibalism. The religious fundamentalist can heap private scorn and derision on whomever he likes, but he cannot kill or torture infidels. When beliefs spill over into harmful actions toward others, tolerance has reached its limits. These include all such harms which inhibit human flourishing. For Clark, humans flourish best when they are: “Secure against violent assault and free to believe what they like, exercise their moral, religious and political practices, associate with like-minded people, contribute to the common good as they see fit, and control their own destiny.”³²

Thus, any actions which prevent human beings from flourishing ought not to be tolerated. Any relativism, religious and philosophical views with thin conceptions of the human person would be inadequate for consideration. One caveat here is this “Be reflective about your beliefs – don't take ideas from your cultural heritage too seriously until they have been subjected to reasoned scrutiny.” Reasoned scrutiny begins with the recognition of the possibility of error. Reasoned scrutiny also requires the sympathetic understanding of others' fundamental beliefs and commitments.³³

²⁹ M., Warnock, “The Limits of Toleration,” in *On Toleration*, Susan Mendus and David Edwards, editors. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

³⁰ K.J., Clark, “The Good of Diversity and the Virtue of Tolerance,” p. 7.

³¹ J., Locke, *Epistola de Toleratione*. “Letter on Tolerance”. Published anonymously in Latin in 1689

³² K.J., Clark, “The Good of Diversity and the Virtue of Tolerance,” p. 8.

³³ K.J., Clark, “The Good of Diversity and the Virtue of Tolerance,” in *The Quarterly Journal of Philosophical Meditations* (Iran), vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 2009, p. 9.

The Virtue of Diversity

We are so many and spread out, some living on hills and others in valleys, our vests vary and our colours are many but beautiful. There are varieties of way in which we teach our young people how to become man and woman; and the ways are many in which they learn how to move forward in society.³⁴

This citation attests to the fact that diversity among peoples of a given nation is a positive endowment. Variety is the spice of life. We find ourselves in a world of religious, social, political and moral diversities. One would say that these diversities create disagreements and divisions, which may be opening harm way to people of other groups. Were we to be all one global culture and religion or all atheists be better for all of us than diversity? According to Christian revelation, Creation is rooted in diversity. God created varieties of things on earth beginning with diverse human races and ethnicity. Another important area of diversity is in human freedom: freedom of expression, freedom of worship, freedom of association, etc. These provide a solid justification for diversity. The holy writs of Judaism, Christianity and Islam affirm the notion that God is tolerant of the multifarious uses of human freedom. God willingly permits wickedness without immediate punishment and virtue without immediate reward. A thick conception of persons as finite creatures, endowed with intrinsic value, and freedom to carve out their own character, combines to provide a rich foundation for the valuing of moral and spiritual diversity.³⁵ God created humans with morally significant freedom. God values the free development of character as well as free contribution to society.³⁶

On the secular ground, there exist reasons for diversity. There are secular equivalents of human creatureliness or finitude. Also human cognitive finitude is nearly universal concept held among many philosophers. If epistemic uncertainty and philosophical plurality are ineluctable parts of the human believing condition, then various reasons for valuing diversity suggest themselves. In our Nigerian situation, where religions divide us, one could say that most of us hold one religious belief or the other or even nonbelievers hold such because that is the way we were brought up. Our cultures or communities, our families and friends shape the context within which we were inculcated with our various religious beliefs. Indeed, it may be safe to say that we do not choose these beliefs in so much as they chose us. They are given to us in our cultural values, stories, traditions, myths, etc. According to John Hick, cultures, communities and families pre-reflectively reinforce our religious beliefs. As we grow older, these often unquestioned beliefs become the lenses through which we view the world. They organize and structure human experience.³⁷ According to Clark, David Barrett in 1990 estimated that worldwide there were 1.7 billion Christians, 934 million Muslims, 705 million Hindus, 323 million Buddhists, 17 million Jews, 18 million Sikhs, as well as millions who follow various tribal and nontraditional religions.³⁸ We can add to this the millions in communist nations who affirm atheism. Given this scenario, sympathetic contact and dialogue with practitioners of other religions is inevitable. We can make a similar

³⁴ Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), *Church in Nigeria...*, op. cit., p. 13; JOHN PAUL II, *Post-Synodal Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 42-43.

³⁵ K.J., Clark "The Good of Diversity and the Virtue of Tolerance, p. 2.

³⁶ K.J., Clark "The Good of Diversity and the Virtue of Tolerance, p. 2.

³⁷ J., Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2005.

³⁸ K. J., Clark, "The Good of Diversity and the Virtue of Tolerance," *The Quarterly Journal of Philosophical Meditations* (Iran), vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 2009, p. 1.

argument about moral diversity. The various religious belief systems offer various models or ideals of human flourishing. In Aristotelian terms, the various religious systems offer different and often competing models of human ends (*telos*). If we wish to increase the probability that one holds the right end, again, one needs to sympathetically view and dialogue with those who hold ends different from her own. There is an obvious epistemic advantage in sympathetically listening to the sincere and deeply moral Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim or atheist. But even if one should come to disagree with most versions of human *teloi* (since many of them are incompatible with one another), one can still learn from these various practitioners the various disciplines or new means for attaining human flourishing. From the Buddhist, we might learn of the value of meditation, from the Platonist of the value of moral education, from the Aristotelian of the value of moral models, from the Muslim the value of self-surrender, and from the Christian of the need for grace and forgiveness. Without sympathetic awareness of those who disagree with us, in what our parents or culture bequeathed to us, we may not be able to grasp the truth on matters of fundamental human concern – religious/moral or ethnic.

Conclusion

In this era of globalization, there is an increased awareness of and contact with moral and religious differences. Ethnically homogenous enclaves are almost thinning up in the world today. For instance, many Nigerians today are multilingual. There is a high appreciation of the “*Wazobia*”³⁹ culture; whereby a particular Nigerian citizen speaks Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo languages, etc. Today also, many Nigerians commingle in many ways: young Nigerians study together in Nigeria institutions and abroad. They do the National Youth Service Corps across the nation's ethnic and geopolitical zones. Also, the recent coalition of the Nigerian youths from various ethnic groups in the Movements for a New Nigeria is evidence of collective spirits. There is also growing culture of intermarriages where people of different ethnic, religious or social groups become connected through marriage. Furthermore, many Nigerians today are hybrids; in that their parents are from different ethnic groups. In the business and entrepreneurial sectors, ethnicity and religions are no longer hindrances. These facts prove that there is hope for a new Nigeria.

Virtue ethics trains on the virtue of tolerate for moral, religious and cultural diversities as varieties of goods for any civil society. If we wish to avoid discrimination and violence, virtue ethics should become an increasingly valuable normative. Virtue ethics confronts societal questions of our ethical relationships toward others in the building of better societies. Virtue ethics compels us to re-examine who we are, why we are here, and how we are connected to everyone around us. It calls for a transformational approach, involving a fundamental change in how we relate to each other in this country if we must remain in Nigeria as one country. Nigeria and her citizens must eschew discrimination, intolerance, prejudice and oppression to embrace the virtue of tolerance and the unity in diversity. This will help us to see the other not as adversary or antagonist but co-participant with us in re-making Nigeria. Negligence of this, on the other hand, would risk reinforcing existing status quo and oppressive systems.

³⁹*Wazobia*, this a coinage of: Wa in Yoruba, Zo in Hausa, Bia in Igbo languages which mean come.

Each moral and religious tradition, social and political groups should look within its authoritative sources to find ways to coherently ground tolerance.⁴⁰ One great challenge here would be to checkmate the powerful enforcing virtuous expectations on others and neglecting it among themselves. However, the focus on virtue as potentially underlying organizational and institutional behaviour holds promise for addressing power explicitly. In the words of J.F. Kennedy:

Let us not be blind to our differences – but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.⁴¹

We are one Nigeria but diverse in nature. “National integration should be the pivot of our existence as a nation and discrimination based on any sort such as religion, ethnicity, language, sex, etc., should be prohibited”.⁴² The respect of this diversity should be the ultimate goal of everyone if we must remain one as a nation, where every person is respected in his/her dignity as a person, valued in his/her possibilities of goods. Each person can then contribute to the promotion of human flourishing, in liberty, justice and peace. Diversity is a blessing and an asset. It is neither a liability nor a curse. Diversity enriches us as a nation with multifaceted perspectives for growth and progress. The human society is blessed with inevitable diversity, a gift which would be nurtured by the virtue of tolerance.

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⁴⁰K.J., Clark, “The Good of Diversity and the Virtue of Tolerance,

⁴¹J.F., Kennedy, Peace Speech in June 10, 1963, in J., Sachs, Ethics in Action: Towards a New Virtue Ethics for Sustainable Development

⁴²Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Section 15, sub section 1.

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