



# Justice and Peace in Nigeria: A Philosophical Exploration

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## ABSTRACT

The paper, “Justice & Peace in Nigeria: A philosophical Exploration” focuses on justice and peace as fundamental concepts for relationships and development of Nigeria. The paper examines the two concepts, focuses on the necessities for justice and peace, and makes suggestions on having greater peace and justice in Nigeria. The following are given as necessities for justice and peace: 1) standards of behavior; 2) Basis of relationships; 3) Dignity of man; 4) Fundamental human right; 5) Sustainable development and 6) Ranking. The suggestions for greater justice and peace in Nigeria are: 1) Holding position as a trust; 2) Education; 3) Punishment of offenders; 4) Addressing structural problems; 5) Good governance and 6) National orientation. The paper concludes that justice and peace will help in addressing the problems that impede Nigeria’s development and greatness, and advocates for their wider application in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Justice, Peace, Nigeria, Philosophical, Society, Potentials, Development and Greatness

## INTRODUCTION

Justice and peace are two fundamental concepts absolutely necessary for co-existence in a society and for the advancement of any nation. They contribute significantly to having a stable and orderly society and to the development of a nation. The paper, “Justice and Peace: A Philosophical Exploration,” is an examination of these two fundamental concepts. The paper will reflect on the concepts, focus on the necessities for justice and peace and make suggestions on having greater justice and peace in Nigeria.

### An Examination Of Justice And Peace

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, justice is “fair treatment of people; the quality of being fair or reasonable” (2015:813). It is significant to note that the Greeks regard justice as one of the four cardinal virtues as observed by Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter (2004:49): “Ancient Greeks saw four traits as cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and courage.... Justice centers on fairness, honesty and the rule of law.” Also, Richard M. Gula (1996:45) affirmed that justice is related to holiness thus: “The other side of holiness requires the expressing of covenantal love through works of justice.” Thus justice connotes fairness, equality and being considerate in the treatment of others. It is related to God and it is a cardinal virtue.

With reference to social justice, Doyin Adeoye (2014:37) affirmed:

*For peaceful co-existence to exist in any society, there is need for justice. Justice, according to the Wikipedia, is a concept of moral rightness, based on ethics, rationality, law, natural law, religion, equity and fairness. Taking into account the inalienable and inborn rights of individuals, social justice should be a right for every individual, without discrimination on the basis of gender identity, ethnicity, religion, age, wealth and other considerations.*

Quoting Femi Aborishade (2014:37), Adeoye further explained:

*Justice is a situation in which the rights of people are observed, such that they are not deprived of those rights under any pretext. Within the context of Nigeria in particular and within the context of the constitution of Nigeria, Section 14 (2b) of the Constitution states that the well-being and security of the people shall be the essence of governance, such that where the well-being of the people is not being guaranteed, then there is no justice in that society.*

*In a situation where people's aspirations cannot be attained, where ordinary needs are being denied, where people do not actively participate in taking decisions on issues that affect them, then we cannot say that there is justice.*

Thus justice in the context of a society implies people enjoying their fundamental human rights, creating an atmosphere of peace and security and ensuring sustainable development.

From the above, we cannot say that there is social justice in Nigeria. A reference to the world day for social justice further substantiates this assertion as all the reasons for the resolution are in Nigeria, like most other third world countries. A *Tribune* Editorial pointed out that the resolution was based on: "the need to consolidate further the efforts of the international community in poverty eradication and in promoting full employment and decent work, gender equality and access to social well-being and justice for all" (2014:13).

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines peace as "a situation or period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country or area; the state of being calm or quiet; the state of living in friendship with somebody without arguing" (2015:1080). These definitions put peace in both personal and public contexts. In his view, Abdulmalik Auwal (2010:58) affirmed: "Peace is the absence of violence and violence can be direct violence, that is, physical, psychological and counter value violence, and structural violence, exclusion, deprivation, deprivation and poverty." Auwal also said that peace "is a process involving activities that are linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and in a wider international community."

According to Rusell Kirk (1964:183), "*Peace is freedom from disturbance, a state of being calm and quiet.* When we say a person is at peace, we mean that his mind is at ease. When we say that a nation is at peace, we mean that it is free from war or revolution." Kirk noted that while most philosophers advocate peace, there have been defenders of war. The former argue that mankind naturally longs for sensitivity and tranquility and that civilization flourishes in peacetime. The latter argue that in times of peace people tend to become decadent and that war develops strong characters and manliness. Such philosophers include Friedrich Nietzsche and George F. Hegel. Kirk also pointed out that it is rare for the civilized world to be at peace for a considerable time in history. Auwal also observed that

*Humanity has grown to accept conflict as part of its nature. Conflict is perceived largely as something devastating, abnormal dysfunctional and therefore detestable. Yet conflict is a fact of life and could be a precursor to positive change.*

*Conflict challenges the rational man to think of alternative ways of meeting contesting human needs and interests. What must be emphasized therefore is not conflict per se but the ways man responds to it.*

The divergent opinions on peace and conflict reflected above notwithstanding, the devastating effects of conflict and the fact that peace is preferred to conflict is undeniable. It can be argued that peace is the normal expectation among people while conflict is an abnormal situation, an aberration, an indication that things have gone wrong and/or that a particular situation has not been handled very well.

## **NECESSITIES FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE**

### **1. Standards of Behavior**

Justice and peace are standards of good behavior. This means that the individual is guided in his/her actions and behaviors by justice and peace. Consequently, he/she ensures that his/her actions are just and

in pursuance of peace. As the Kantian principle suggests, universalizing one's actions would produce a better world.

In practical terms, being guided by justice and peace means one eschews cheating, trampling on the rights of others, being fair to others and pursuing equity. With reference to peace, it means one pursues peaceful relationship with others, refrains from acts of violence and makes effort to seek reconciliation when there is conflict. It can be affirmed that greater efforts to make justice and peace parameters for behavior is one of the urgent needs of the nation. In the light of the increasing tension and violence in the nation, there is need for a greater commitment to justice and peace in the nation and on the part of the generality of the citizens.

## **2. *Basis of Relationship***

Justice and peace are cardinal principles in effecting good relationships with others and each one should adopt them accordingly. Also, they form a contextual framework to build a society that would be marked by progress and true development. With them there would be a more conducive atmosphere as there would be improved relationships among individuals, in families, organizations and the society at large. This submission agrees with Charles Colson's (2001:12-13) assertion that the meaning of justice "is a central question for any society to ask in any era, in any time, because it goes to the heart of what a society is. At the very least, every society wants to create a just, moral order so that people can live together in harmony and security."

In our context justice and peace will reduce violence and thus bring about a saner society. This is especially with respect to the problems of Boko Haram, the Indigenous People of Biafra, armed robbery, ritual killing and kidnapping which are ravaging the country and killing so many people. The problems are essentially relational, and justice and peace would help in overcoming the problems. Through justice one recognizes the worth and right of the other person(s) and want to give him his/her due. For peace we want to overcome barriers of relationship, and see others as our brothers and sisters with whom we must co-exist peacefully. This is the relevance of love for peace. Love helps us to transcend such barriers of relationship as ethnicity, language and religion. Love will overpower deep-rooted feelings of animosity, bitterness and hatred which make people to see others as enemies and objects to be eliminated or instruments to pursue their agenda.

It is significant to note that a common basis binding people together has always been a strong factor of building relationship and thus enhancing justice and peace. This is one area we must emphasize in our search, our common unity and oneness. The more the vision of oneness we share with others spreads, the quicker we shall overcome disunity, another factor for seeing others as enemies.

## **3. *Dignity of Man***

The acceptance of justice and peace relates to the concept of the dignity of man. Fundamentally, it is when we accept that man is of great worth that we see justice as his inalienable right. From the biblical perspective, the dignity of man is a corollary of his being created in the image of God. As Gula (1996:22) said, "From the motif of the image of God, the Bible vigorously affirms the sacredness or dignity of every person." This means that when we give justice to a man, we are not doing so just because we like him or want to favor him. Rather, we do so in recognition of his infinite worth as a person created in the image of God. From this perspective, injustice is offensive to God. This explains the theological description of God as the God of the oppressed. This description pictures God as the God who defends the rights of the oppressed and fights on their behalf.

One problem in Nigeria today is the relatively low value placed on human life. This problem manifests in violence in the North where people are sometimes slaughtered or burnt in their houses in scores. It manifests in the kidnapping in the South where people are held hostage and ransom has to be paid before their release. It manifests in the 'baby factory' of the East where women are held captives to deliver babies that would be sold. It manifests in the ritual murder in the West where people are killed for rituals. These manifestations are apart from such other socio-economic issues as embezzling pension fund and the neglect of infrastructure which precipitate the sorrow, agony and untimely death of many people. If Nigeria will be a truly great nation, there is need for improvement on the value place on human life.

**4. Fundamental Human Right**

Justice is one of the rights of an individual as enshrined in the constitution. This is why a suspect is deemed innocent until proved otherwise by a court of law. We must see the issue of justice as fundamental, as people's inalienable right and not as a favor to them. The more this understanding spreads in our society, the more we shall have justice spread in the nation. All those who have jurisdiction over others and those who are in control of the apparatus of justice especially need to keep this truth in mind. Since justice and peace are part of man's fundamental rights, if he is denied of them he is not accorded his due honor as a human being. As Anthony A. Akinwale (2010) observed, "To be human is to have inalienable rights. To speak of fundamental human rights is to speak of rights that are inherent in human nature, rights that belong to us because we are human." Akinwale identified denial of fundamental human rights as a cause of conflicts thus: "The myriads of ethnic and religious conflicts we have witnessed in the history of the country are traceable to the unwillingness to respect and promote human and civil rights of every Nigerian wherever that Nigerian is found within the boundaries of Nigeria."

There is so much inequality and injustice in the country and this has impacted negatively on our public image and rating among the countries of the world. For instance, Chukwudi Akasike (2017:18) reported that Amnesty International accused the Nigerian army and other armed forces of human rights violation. Nigeria needs to improve on her human right index and heed the clarion call of Amos 5:24: "But let justice roll down like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

**5. Sustainable Development**

Justice and peace promote a conducive social atmosphere and a good society. Thus they are necessary for sustainable development as they impact on the growth and development of a nation. Without justice and peace, a nation cannot experience sustainable development. A nation without justice and peace cannot develop effectively because it will be characterized by dissatisfaction, violence, conflicts and so on. The need for good governance has become even more imperative in the light of the various agitations in the country like that of the Independent People of Biafra which the Federal Government has now proscribed as reported by Ade Adesomoju (2017:7) thus: "The Federal Government has gazetted the order of the Federal High Court in Abuja which proscribed the Indigenous People of Biafra and designated the group as a terrorist organization."

Auwal pointed out that peace is "a necessary prerequisite for development and good governance." Terna Afella (2010:26) also identified social injustice as a cause of conflicts thus: "Social injustice, economic exploitation, political marginalization and corruption are among the causes of conflicts in Nigeria." Similarly, Akinwale linked violations of human rights and underdevelopment thus:

*Violation of human dignity takes the form of abbreviation of our common humanity and results in the alienation of the human person. But any affront to human dignity is an obstacle on the path of authentic development. Ours is a challenge to see the link between violations of human dignity, which remains rampart in Nigeria despite her democratic profession or pretension, the resurgence of often violent and destructive ethnic and religious conflicts, and the lingering problem of underdevelopment.*

Africa presents a spectrum of the absence of justice and peace. For example, Sudan and Congo are countries characterized by killings, destruction of the environment, and exodus of nationals to other countries. The Nigerian situation is another case in point. For years now, the northern part has been going through "war" where routinely lives are terminated and properties destroyed. Needless to say, the development of the area is affected negatively. There is exodus of people and businesses from the area, apart from the fact that new investors are discouraged from going to the "war zones." The reversal caused by the Boko Haram tragedy would take years, if ever, to rebuild.

**6. Ranking**

Justice and peace are also indexes for ranking. As noted above, lack of justice and peace impact negatively on societies and nations. Among other factors, lack of justice and peace in the third world countries contributes to their ranking among the comity of nations in the world. Certainly, the

backwardness of so many African countries is connected with the absence of justice and peace in these nations. This agrees with Afella's comment on the effects of religious conflicts in Nigeria thus:

*There is no gainsaying the fact that when people willingly take laws into their hands especially prompted by faith, the consequences in terms of destruction is always unquantifiable. This has been the case in Nigeria where lives and properties were destroyed leading the nation to the brinks of total collapse.*

Again, Nigeria's ranking in the world should be improved a factor for the improvement is a greater manifestation of justice and peace.

## **TOWARDS GREATER JUSTICE AND PEACE IN NIGERIA**

### **1. Holding Position As A Trust**

Those who are in positions should remember that they hold the positions in trust. Therefore, they should not betray the trust reposed in them. Trust is a fabric of social contract that binds the leaders and the led and should be upheld by public officers. This will make public officers to work for justice and peace and refrain from words and actions that may impact negatively on justice and peace in the society. It will be a great disservice if those who are maintained by the tax payers' money would do things that would impact negatively on justice and peace.

Allied with holding position as a trust is living with a sense of history. Leaders should know that they would be remembered by what they have done. So they should leave good legacies that would make the nation to remember them for good.

### **2. Education**

"Knowledge is power," according to Francis Bacon. Consequently, education is indispensable towards greater justice and peace in Nigeria. Education gives a new orientation, promotes understanding and broadens one's horizon. Thus education makes one more conscious of his/her rights and the needs to protect them. Also, it makes one more tolerant of other people's rights and the need to accord them accordingly. It is undeniable that ignorance is a major factor for violence in Nigeria.

Of special reference in this regard is peace education, a strategy for promoting peace. Alimba N. Chinyere (2010:183) defines peace education thus:

*Peace education is a holistic education that moderates unwarranted behavior in a society. It is based on the philosophy that teaches non-violence, honesty, justice, equity, tolerance, cooperation, accountability, compassion and respect for differences and people. Peace education is a social mechanism that radiates skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that are essential for the development of people and their societies. Ethno-religious conflicts are basically caused by selfishness, greediness, intolerance, injustice, corruption, discrimination, inequality and so on. These negative vices are challenges which peace education can tackle.*

With reference to its aim, Chinyere affirmed, "The basic aim of peace education is the promotion of skills, knowledge and attitudes that are needed by people to create a culture of peace in a society."

### **3. Punishment of Offenders**

One reason why injustice and conflict spread in the nation is the fact that those who offend are not punished adequately. This creates the impression that one can commit an offense and get away with it. It is necessary to punish offenders so that it can serve as a deterrent to others.

In most of the riots that have occurred in the nation, one hardly hears of perpetrators of such riots being brought to book. Yet this recommendation is usually made in studies of riots. For instance, on the September 2001 Jos riot Auwal recommended, among others suggestions:

*Government should investigate all ethno-religious conflicts, bring violators of human rights resulting from ethnic and religious violence to justice and compensate victims and their families in accordance with the resolution passed or adopted by the African commission on human and people right dated for June, 2004.*

**4.     *Addressing Structural Problems***

Structural problems that promote injustice and violence should be addressed to enhance peace and justice. These include exploitation, marginalization and discrimination. There is increasing call for the restructuring of the nation as a way to move the country forward. However, there are those who are opposed to the call. Significantly, the National Conference of 2014 would have been one of the best opportunities in addressing structural problems that impede justice and peace in the nation, but the report of the conference has not been implemented.

Auwal also noted, as a suggestion for conflict resolution, that government should provide the basic necessities of life for the populace and ensure equitable distribution of the nation's resources to all segments of the society.

**5.     *Good Governance***

Good governance is necessary for greater justice and peace. Good governance will address the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens and give them a sense of belonging. Good governance will create a conducive environment and promote growth and development. Chukwuma Okparaocha (2017:35) reported Gov. Nyeson Wike's speech that only good governance will stop agitations in the nation. "The governor pointed out that the country could not continue with the current level of impunity and injustice, saying it was time for the right thing to be done.... He called for better security and justice for all federating units to give all Nigerians a sense of belonging and reduce tension across the land." It is significant to note that justice is identified as a factor for good governance.

Another component of good governance is the rule of law. The rule of law must be guaranteed for justice and peace in the society. As John W. De Gruchy (2002:200) noted, "The more culturally pluralistic and economically divided a society, the more disparate the concepts of justice and the greater the contest around its achievement." Colson (2001:15) also wrote on what he believes "to be the first rule of a just society: the rule of law, an objectively true juridical framework for maintaining and assuring just treatment of, and relating among, all citizens. A society has a foundation for justice when it observes the rule of law based on objective truth." Thus the integrity of the rule of law should be preserved for it to serve as the last arbiter for those who need redress and to punish offenders. Colson

**6.     *National Orientation***

Due to the level of decay and damage injustice and violence have caused the nation, a serious, concerted national orientation will help in promoting peace and justice in Nigeria. The government should be sincere about the orientation. Among others, the orientation should include the necessity and benefits of peace, the imperativeness of justice for national unity, the need for paradigm shift for the nation to move forward and the need to think in terms of the nation than of ethnic and political divides.

**CONCLUSION**

Nigeria is so richly blessed by God and her potentials are great. She is potentially a very great nation and there have been prophecies about Nigeria's role in being a greater blessing to the nations. However, the nation is a paradox of a nation so richly blessed and her people are poor. Despite her enormous potentials, Nigeria is one of the less developed countries and some have even described it as a failing state. Our nation cannot develop and become great when she is bedeviled by violence, inter-tribal and religious conflicts. Justice and peace will help in addressing these problems that impede the nation's development and greatness. Therefore, they should be pursued more vigorously to facilitate the development and greatness of the nation.

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