

# Love Your Neighbour as Yourself: A Practical Solution to the Nigeria Problem

Nzeyo Gabriel Eteng

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River, Nigeria

\* [inhisservice030613@gmail.com](mailto:inhisservice030613@gmail.com)

## Abstract

"Love your neighbour as yourself" is a love principle which forms the central focus of Christian Ethics and it is taught across other major world religious traditions. This principle was taught by Jesus Christ and expounded by many Biblical Scholars emphasizes the fact that whatever an individual cannot and will not do to self in goodwill and good knowledge should not do the same to his neighbour. At present, Nigeria is engulfed in several conflicts and challenges, arising from Ethno-religious crises, herder-farmers conflicts, injustice in appointment and employment, bribery and corruption, political, economic crises as well as gender-based violence, and most recently "ENDSARS" Protest arising from police brutality to the citizenry. This paper adopted the descriptive methods of secondary data collection and used the qualitative methods to analyses the data collated. One of the recommendations made is that the "Principle of love your neighbour as yourself" should be practiced by every Nigerian irrespective of the diversities of religion, tribe, language, age, sex, gender, or colour.

**Keywords:** Neighbour, Love, injustice, violence, "ENDSARS".

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Christ summarized the whole duty of man, "to love God with our whole being, and our neighbours as ourself" (Breckinridge 1859, p. 297). Love if practiced accordingly without bias and it is not smeared with sentiments, often proves to be the timeless interventional remedy to most of the problems and challenges facing humanity everywhere in the world. God is love and love itself puts the one who practices it in the place of God to interface cultural, religious, tribal or ethnic, political and gender-based differences. Love could be the long-awaited solution to Nigeria's many problems. If this principle or theory is practiced exactly as taught by Christ, in action, deeds and words everywhere in the world, and especially in Nigeria, it will solve a myriad of problems confronting the Nigerian state. It will be a contemporary panacea to conflict everywhere in the world. Nigeria, since independence has been underdeveloped, in spite of her numerous rich human and natural resources. The spate of increasing widespread conflicts, nepotism,

corruption, injustice, disunity amongst others has been the bane of Nigeria's under-development and economic growth. Consequently, successive civil societies, individuals and social engineers have come up with lofty and promising policies. Intended to provide a lasting solution to the hydra-headed problems confronting Nigeria as a nation.

It is quite unfortunate that Nigeria at present is being confronted by so many problems emanating from ethno-religious crises, political crises corruption, social injustices, herder-farmer conflict, gender-based violence and most recently "ENDSARS" protest which brought the country to a political, economic and social lockdown, besides the COVID-19 Lockdown (Dambo et al., 2020). The catalogue of problems and challenges, notwithstanding if the principle is inculcated into our national ethical code and major stakeholders conscientized based on this principle, will provide a timeless solution to our national challenges. Nigeria's government promising ideas or solutions which include granting of amnesty, youth empowerments,

launching of a severe fight against corruption and other developmental policies intended towards curbing youth restiveness, corruption, killings and maiming, etc. are yet to have proven effectiveness. In 2000, President Olusegun Obasanjo submitted to the National Assembly a Bill for an Act to provide for the repeal of Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEAC) Decree 23 of 1992. Among other things, the President's goal was to establish a new commission with reorganized management and administrative structure for more effective use of the special funds it will receive from the federation account to tackle ecological and other related problems: . . ." (Wangbu 2018, p. 159).

This is an extract from the act establishing the Niger Delta Development Commission which was to provide a lasting solution to the several Niger Delta crises. Unfortunately, the commission has not achieved any of its objectives, rather it has become a channel for the political office holders to siphon funds. Another example of the government's effort to combat one of the vices destroying Nigeria economically is the establishment of Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) under the explanatory memorandum, the Act partly states: The act seeks to prohibit and prescribe punishment for corrupt practices and other related offences ..." (The establishment Act-ICPC gov.ng/theestablishment/act/23/2/2021). It is quite unfortunate that this also has failed in that it has not solved Nigeria's problem of corruption and impoverishment of the masses. The Nigerian Army has on her part struggled so hard to reduce the level of insecurity in Nigeria with many positive results, rather the majority of the army lost their lives in the process.

The paper is set to discuss the principle of love and its positive effects towards a peaceful co-existence of all irrespective of religion, race, sex, ethnicity, colour, gender, etc. It will analyze the different types of love with an emphasis on agape love which is the love revealed by God in Christ. The paper will end in recommendations as a way forward.

## 1. THE DEPLORABLE STATE OF NIGERIA

Nigeria like every other third world or developing nation is faced with characteristic injustice, corruption, killings, rape, robberies, kidnappings, herders' killings and all forms of vices that have made life unbearable for the citizens. Politically, Nigeria has and is still undergoing a painful experience of colonialism and neocolonialism. The external western colonial masters

in Nigeria's political experience still have much impact on the political structure of contemporary Nigerian society (Uchegbue, n.d, p. 435). The situation is pathetic where a few privileged holds to power and are not willing to let go. For example, the Fulanis, a minority group are holding to power and they are ready to shed blood if challenged. Nigerian electoral system is characterized by rigging and thuggery, killings and wanton destruction of properties and the sufferings meted on the opposition parties. Uchegbue (n.d.) in his observation states that; "what is normally elections in Nigeria are a mere travesty and rape of democracy and institutionalized robbery of the people's franchise" (p. 5). This truth is epitomized in recent elections, from 2015 to 2019, where a particular ethnic minority group feels the right of leadership belongs to them and as such, they are prepared to shed blood to maintain this position. Economy, a small group of rich and powerful few Nigerian control the wealth and oil wells of Nigeria at the expense of millions of the population. The 2004 publication of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) reveals what it describes as "startling paradox". This means that more than two-thirds of the Nigerian people are poor, despite living in a country with vast potential wealth (Uchegbue n.d, p. 5). The Nigerian state is capitalist with all its attendant characteristics of competition for wealth. The rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer because the rich and powerful are not willing to allow the poor to have a share of the national cake so that they can stand on their own. An average civil servant's take-home can hardly make ends meet e.g. take care of the feeding of the family, education of children, payment of house rent. An average civil servant lives on loans throughout his active work period and retires from service with little or no hope for the payment of his entitlements. Mr. John a civil servant lamented that he pays his children school fees from loans, bought his car from loans, pays his house rent from loans, he even got a loan to enable him get married (Oral interview 20/6/2020).

The young men who are involved in criminality like kidnapping, armed robbery, stealing and the rest of the vices do it as a result of frustration, lack of job opportunities yet the rich in the society swim in affluence and wealth. According to Uchegbue (n.d), the true nature of Nigeria's economy is due to internal forces and activities of the political-economic oligarchs. Nigeria's poverty is, therefore, no more the poverty of people within a poor society, but the poverty of people

within a rich society (p. 7). Economic corruption prevails in both private and public sectors. In the private, it exists through an increase in the cost of business inflation in the normal prices of goods, hoarding of essential commodities, illicit payment, breaches in contracts, unhealthy competition, adulteration of products, and so on (Chijioke et al., 2019). In the public sector, distortion into government's budgetary plans, diversion of public investment into private projects, bribes, kickbacks of the government plan, reduction in the quality of government plans and infrastructures, etc., (Ewetan & Ese 2014). Insecurity pervades the ethnic and geopolitical zones in Nigeria. People are no longer safe to travel by land as the bandits and herders have taken over most of the forests in Nigeria to kill, maim, rape and harass innocent passengers on our roads. Thus, warnings abound from security agents for travelers to avoid going to any of the North East or North West of Nigeria, the North Central is not safe. Avoid Kaduna by all means. Your best choice is to travel by air to any of the core northern states. While traveling in the South West, your fatherland, beware of non-indigenous armed kidnappers, and murderers. They are usually of Fulani extraction, armed, armed vicious, bloodthirsty, eager to settle primordial scores and brutality savage. The armed Fulani men target evening and night for their operations. They are most active on weekends especially at dawn, evenings, or nights on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays (Salihu 2018; Ojo 2020).

The leadership of the Nigerian society is insensitive to the plight of the citizens. There is a deep gulf in people living together in peace and unity. Most leaders and well-to-do Nigerians do not make good their promises to the young men, which makes the relationship between the ruled and the rulers unhealthy and later culminates in physical attacks, robbery and kidnapping of victims, abduction of innocent children in public and private schools abound as the issue of insecurity in the country are very alarming. Police brutality on citizens resulted in the #ENDSARS Protest that started in August 2020. This protest resulted in wanton killings of youth and police officers, Nigeria experienced unabated bloodshed and loss of lives, and vandalization of properties worth trillions of Naira. The reason being that these young people felt neglected, improvised and abandoned, while the COVID relief that was sent to all the states was locked up in warehouses. The wanton killings, maiming, and destruction of properties worth billions of naira by Fulani herders abound also. According to

Adedibu (2017), "the Open Grazing Bill, Ruga initiative and seeming official indulgence of rampaging Fulani herdsmen have offered little comfort to the teaming traumatized population in the country". He further says, "Key appointments into the presidency, federal Executive Council and all agencies of the Federal Government since the inception of the Muhammadu Buhari as president have accentuated the strong feeling of anti-Christian bias. Even where the appointment is zoned to the North, it is almost the exclusion of Christians" (p. 23). It is no gainsaying to state that the Fulanis are in total control of every sphere of the Nigerian society, courtesy of their leader, who is on the seat of power. It is glaring from the above that hatred, official wickedness, and all kinds of vices prevail in Nigeria, what can be done to restore peace, unity, and harmony? Should Nigerians accept revolution, can war solve the problem? These questions will be answered in this research.

## 2. THE CENTRALITY OF LOVE IN CHRISTIANITY

Love is central to Christian ethics (Simmons & Sorrells 2016; Akpanika & Eyo 2020). In the Old Testament, the commonest Hebrew word for love is 'ahab'. Finds a correlation in the Greek word Agape, several other words were used to describe the different types of love (Templeton 1999). These are Eros, Philia, Storge and Agape. Eros refers to the physical attraction that usually exists among opposite sexes. It is emotional, sentimental feelings towards other people. Philia refers to the affection of friends and kindred spirits or a liking for something. This type of love is mostly based on mutual feelings between friends. Storge refers to natural affection; for example, love between a mother and child. However, this love is limited because it is confined to one's children. Agape love is God's kind of love. It describes the self-giving love of God revealed in Jesus Christ which is the motivating factor and pattern for Christian living (Udugwomen, 2009; Edet 2019; Udok et al., 2020). The first three are all-natural to men, except agape. It is only when agape is in full control that other types of love will function properly. Agape is what controls and regulates all human relationships. It is agape love that needs to be shown towards one's neighbour. Agape love is practiced horizontally towards man, the scripture emphasized thus; "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind and neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

The various teachings of Apostle Paul provide a model for the expression of love to God and others (Gal. 5:4, 6:2; Rom. 5:8; II Cor. 5:14). The importance of love cannot be overemphasized, Paul states as follows:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but have no love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountain, but have not love, I am nothing . . . Love suffers long and is kind, love does not envy, love does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth, bears all things believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things . . . And how abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love (I Cor. 13:1-13).

This kind of agape love is not just a revelation of theological truth, it is a love that compels us and helps people to live fulfilled lives in the midst of turbulence. It is love that is kind, does not behave rudely, and does not rejoice in iniquity or wickedness.

### 3. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF NEIGHBOURHOOD

Jesus Christ summarizes the whole duty of man to God and humanity as LOVE (Noll 2013). He further states that to love God is to love Him with our whole being, heart, and soul, and to love humanity is to love our neighbours as ourselves:

Then one of them, a lawyer asked Him a question, testing Him and saying, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets (Matt. 22:34-40).

Man's relationship with his creator and the fellow man hangs on the principle of love. Most importantly it is the love of one's neighbour which is evidence of the love for the creator, God. The scripture clearly states "Beloved, let us love one another for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God . . . if someone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (I John 4:7-20). Jesus gave a detailed

explanation of the Biblical concept of love in His illustration of the story of the Good Samaritan. In response to a question asked by a lawyer, who is a neighbour? Jesus narrated the story of a man who embarked on a journey and was attacked by thieves leaving him half dead. Three different types of people passed through the scene of the accident; a Priest, a Levite and a Samaritan. The first two were acclaimed religious people while the last was acclaimed as a sinner. In the contemporary Nigerian society, the Priest represents the Pastors, Bishops, evangelist, Apostles, Elders, Music Directors, Singers, Choristers, etc. and the Samaritan represents the "unbelievers", those who do not go to church, the armed robbers, bandits, prostitutes, killers, cultist, etc. From the account, we will discover that the unreligious man was the one who was compassionate towards the dying man. He showed love, took him and cleaned his wounds, got him a place in a hotel and bought him food. In the end., Jesus asked "Which of these three do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" Jesus used this to explain the Biblical concept of neighborhood. The first two represent the neighbours who are not sensitive to the plight of others, the last person represents selfless neighbours, a true picture of the Biblical concept of neighbourhood. Therefore, one's neighbour does not mean someone living in the same neighbourhood, but every human being whether a stranger irrespective of age, sex, colour, gender, race, tribe, etc. A neighbour is whoever we come in contact with, for example, people living in the same environment, working in the same place, people we come in contact at the street, market places, business centers and so on. This concept for Nigeria implies that, the politicians, leaders, criminals, cultists, kidnappers, rapists, Boko-haram, Fulani herders and all Nigerian citizens need to practice good neighbourliness as taught by Jesus in order to curb all the vices that exist in the society.

On the other hand, the preachers of the gospel rather than live in affluence should practice good neighbourliness by giving help to the vulnerable in the society. From Jesus's explanations, a good neighbour is one who is sensitive to the plight of others, one who can inconvenience himself or herself for the sake of someone in need or in danger. If Nigerians should exhibit good neighbourliness, there will be peaceful co-existence irrespective of the diversities of religions. It is not gainsaying therefore to state that the solution to the insecurity, hunger, killings and bitterness existing in Nigeria is the practice of love towards neighbours.

#### 4. THE APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF

The principles of loving your neighbour as yourself have the following implications for Nigeria. The Golden Rule as taught by Jesus emphasizes that people should strive to do unto other people what they want to be done to them. It is a divine law. "And as you would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (Luke 6:31). If the average Nigerian citizens, politicians, businessmen, armed robbers and kidnappers should live by this principle, society would have been devoid of all sorts of crimes. Secondly, the law of sowing and reaping is synonymous with the law of karma in Buddhism and Hinduism. According to the Christians principles, the law of sowing and reaping signifies the reward people get from their actions. Be not deceived God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7). Every action, whether good or bad is rewarded according to this law. It is an infallible law of nature, that all actions attract rewards. Such rewards may be immediate or long-term. However, the seasons for sowing and reaping do not fail. "Too everything there is a season. A time for every purpose under the heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to pluck what is planted: (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2).

A man who steals kills, or embezzles public funds does it at the expense of his happiness which will elude him in the season of reaping. Thirdly, the principle of altruism is regard for others. It is brotherly kindness. Altruism is opposed to egoism or selfishness. It is a sacrificial lifestyle; Jesus lives this way while on earth. According to Luther's observation, the Good Samaritan was altruistic to the core because he had regards for and devotion to the interest of the wounded man. He showed concern for the vulnerable in society. Most of these vulnerable are young girls/women who are raped everywhere, others are kidnapped and some are robbed and cheated. God created human beings with a conscience, the inherent capacity to know the good from evil, right from wrong. The human experience is by definition ethical, therefore, love as the central focus of Christian ethics can be practiced to bring about good life (Esikot et al., 2019). The sincerity of this kind of love must be shown in the life of every Nigerian by not getting involved in anything injurious to self and others in the face of provocations and uncontrolled situations.

#### 5. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Love is a virtue that can curb evil in society. Love is mankind's most potent weapon for personal and social transformation. Love must be practiced vertically, towards God as the creator "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37); and horizontally, towards fellow humans. "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Legislation and law enforcement cannot solve the problem inherent in hatred, bitterness, contention, violence and wanton destruction of lives and property in a country like Nigeria with diverse ethnic groups and religions. otherwise, most ex-convicts would have been transformed character-wise. The Biblical command to love one another is a call to a way of life for the Christians, this would go a long way in transforming the lives of people who will eventually rescue evil in society. Love is the most potent force on earth, no individual, society, organization or government can prevail without love. This research recommends the following:

1. The Christian community in Nigeria must practice love as taught by Jesus, such practice should not be limited to fellow Christians but also non-Christians, especially those regarded as sinners. According to Kenyon (2000), a foremost Christian leader and writer; "if you find a believer that doesn't walk in love, it is because his mind has not yet been renewed" (p. 77). Kenyon's (2000) position implies that love is the core of Christianity, therefore one cannot attest to be a Christian without love. If Christians practice love among themselves, it will spread like wildfire to the people of other religious groups (Edet 2019).
2. As a way of correcting the ills in society, emphasis must not be on what society offers us, but rather what we offer the society individually to change the ills of the society.
3. Christians must be willing at all times to sacrificially give their services to the general good of humanity. This way, they emulate Jesus' way of life expressing the love of God for mankind.
4. The fact that no religion preaches hatred means all religions embrace love which must be preached as the love message.
5. The three major religions practice in Nigeria should unite together, and their ethics. For instance, the Christian religious ethics centers on love, the Islamic ethics centers on justice and the African religious ethics centers on shame and justice. If love, justice and shame are put together, there will be no problem in Nigeria.

6. Finally, agape love must be practice horizontally and vertically if Nigeria must get rid of hatred, killings, maiming robberies, kidnappings, cheatings, raping and all kinds of vices that have rendered Nigeria a country characterized by bloodsheds and wickedness.

## 7. REFERENCES

- Adedibu B. (2017). Editorial Comment: A Matter of Time Camp, Ogun State: The Trainer Magazine RCBC Main Campus, A Publication of the Redeemed Christian Bible College, (7).
- Akpanika, E. N., & Eyo, U. E. (2020). A Comparative Study of the concept of sin in Christianity and Efik Traditional Religion of South-South, Nigeria. *Lwati: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 17(3), 126-148.
- Brekinridge, R. J. (1859). *The Knowledge of God, Subjectively Considered: Being the Second Part of Theology Considered as a Science of Positive Truth, Both Inductive and Deductive*. R. Carter & brothers.
- Chijioke, N., Samuel, O. M., Ekwutosi, E. M., & Anyim, A. B. (2019). Nigeria, Nigerians and Xenophobic Attacks; Political and Economic Implications: A Phenomenological Approach. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, 2(2), 22-30.
- Dambo, T. H., Ersoy, M., Auwal, A. M., Olorunsola, V. O., Olonode, A., Arikewuyo, A. O., & Joseph, A. (2020). Nigeria's #EndSARS movement and its implication on online protests in Africa's most populous country. *Journal of Public Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2583>
- Edet, F. F. (2009). The concept of God in African traditional religion. *Sophia: An African Journal of Philosophy*, 12(1), 127-135.
- Edet, F. F. (2019). Bornagainism as a Cardinal Teaching of Pentecostalism. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, 2(1), 92-103.
- Edet, F. F. (2019). Interactions Between the Traditional Religion of the Efik and Christianity: A Socio-Cultural Investigation. *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research*, 3(3), 225-231.
- Edet, F. F. (2019). Interactions Between the Traditional Religion of the Efik and Christianity: A Socio-Cultural Investigation. *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research*, 3(3), 225-231.
- Esikot, I. F., Bessong, P. K., & Ette, E. E. (2019). An Examination of Spinoza's Moral Philosophy. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, 2(1), 10-19.
- Ewetan, O. O., & Ese, U. (2014). Insecurity and socio-economic development in Nigeria. *Journal of sustainable development studies*, 5(1), 40-63.
- Independent Corrupt Practices And Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). (n.d.). *The Establishment Act*. ICPC [icpc.gov.ng](http://icpc.gov.ng). <https://icpc.gov.ng/the-establishment-act/>.
- Kenyon, E. W. (2000). New Creation Realities, USA, Kenyon's Gospel Society.
- New International Version Students Bible (NIVSB). (1986). Michigan: Zonderuan Publishing House.
- Noll, M. A. (2013). *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Ojo, J. S. (2020). Governing "Ungoverned Spaces" in the Foliage of Conspiracy: Toward (Re) ordering Terrorism, from Boko Haram Insurgency, Fulani Militancy to Banditry in Northern Nigeria. *African Security*, 13(1), 77-110.
- Salihu, H. A. (2018). The Armed-Fulani-Herdsmen and violent attacks against farmers and farming communities in Nigeria: An Overview. *KIU Journal of Humanities*, 3(3), 169-184.
- Simmons, F. V., & Sorrells, B. (Eds.). (2016). *Love and Christian Ethics: Tradition, Theory, and Society*. Georgetown University Press.
- Templeton, J. (1999). *Agape love: Tradition in eight world religions*. Templeton Foundation Press.
- Uchegbue C. (n.y). "The place of the Church in the Socio-political and Economic Liberation of Nigeria" Unpublished Lecture Materials, Department of Religious and Cultural Studies.
- Udok, M. B., Eton, C. U., & Akpanika, E. N. (2020). Coronavirus pandemic and its effect on African religiosity. *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI)*, 3(3), 109-114.
- Wangbu, J. K. (2018). *The Niger Delta Paradox: Impoverished in the Midst of Abundance*. Ibadan: Safari Books Ltd.