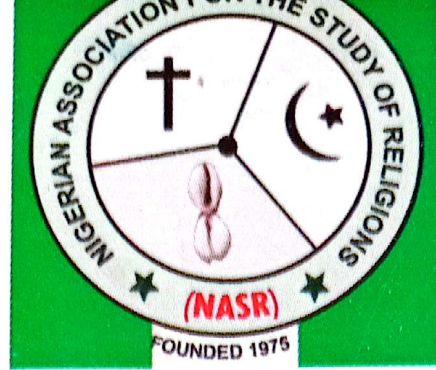




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A THEOLOGICAL NARRATIVE OF GEN 13: 7-12 IN THE CONTEXT OF RESTRUCTURING NIGERIA

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Abstract

We live in a world of conflicts that is characterized by loss of lives and property that could not be estimated or quantified in terms of money. When Abraham in Gen 13: 7-12 went back to Canaan and came to the region around Bethel, there was friction between his herders and those of his nephew Lot. A division had to be made because of the scarcity of land. The task of this paper is on how to apply deductions from this narrative into the agitation for restructuring in the Nigerian context. Narratives and analytical methods were explored. From the analysis of the above biblical text, it was found that the age-long conflicts between herders and farmers are not intractable. An adaptation of the conflict resolution in the text under review will go a long way in solving our domestic perennial clashes between these parties. Therefore, it is recommended that Sambisa grazing reserve will be an ideal place for the Ruga Programme or ranching centers for the herders or better still, be the nomadic they use to be.

Keywords: Theology, Restructuring, Nigeria, Canaan and Ruga Programme.

Introduction

How should we respond in faith to conflict? We live in an age where conflict is everywhere in our nation. We see it in society with the constant lawsuits and the never ending money laundering and bad leadership in our nation (Nigeria). Abraham is considered to have an original homeland in a settled region in Paddan Harran. It is true that he lived in tents and moved his livestock from place to place. The theme of the land inheritance is utterly foreign to the nomadic way of life but a fundamental principle of the settled economy. In the Jacob story, it is always assumed that the land of Canaan is Jacob's homeland, which he would give as an inheritance to his sons.

This part sets out as a background for this work. It speaks about the movement, direction and condition of the character in the text. It is the primary part of the text which speaks about the persons in the socio-economical context. Abraham moved from place to place to find the best condition to live. Life is a bundle of different needs and desires. This part will give not only the reason of Abraham's journey, but also the theological significance as he is the father of faith.

The chapter starts with word "*went up from Egypt*" (v. 1). It is a possible allusion to the Exodus.⁴ The move of Abraham from Egypt is a symbol of freedom for the Israelite. The Israelite moved to the land which flows with "milk and honey." Abraham moved to the land which God promised him.

The journey of Abraham is not only for the need of life but also the spiritual needs as we find in the text. "*He moved his camp by stages to Bethel*" (v. 3) clearly indicates that he was journeying from Egypt to get to Bethel. He went away on his journey through the South as far as Bethel. He set out from Egypt not so as to enter the desert which he had left along with Egypt, but so as to come through the South, which is opposite the North, to the house of God where his tent was in between Bethel and Ai.⁵ In the journey of Abraham, the word Sinai comes as by stages. It is a term which indicates the stopping places of the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 17: 1, Num. 10: 12).⁶

He had left Egypt and the desert entirely to go at once to the place of God's presence. This text is parallel to Exodus 3: 12, saying that "Israel that was set free from Egyptian slavery at once worshiped God on this mountain." There is also a parallelism between Abraham's journey and that of the Book of Joshua concerning the site of the first battle. Just as Abraham encamped there when he came up from Haran, and also on his return from Egypt in order to possess the land of Canaan; even so his descendants began there the series of battles for the conquest of the country.⁷

Lot was the son of Abraham's brother Haran. He might have been caught up in the enthusiasm of Abraham's decision to be a pilgrim or else merely desiring a change or a bettering of his condition.⁸ Lot was always attracted to the newness in life. "*Lot went along with him*" (v. 5): We cannot tell here whether Lot went with Abraham of his own free will, and whether he was fully aware of the reason for this journey to an unknown country or whether he had been taken along by his uncle.⁹ Lot followed his uncle Abraham on his extensive journeying, passing through the land of Canaan, accompanying him on his way to and from Egypt. But his return back to the Promised Land differed in some respect from his original journey from Haran to the Holy Land.¹⁰

Regarding the departure from Haran it is stated, "And Abraham took Sarah his wife, and Lot his brother's son and all their sustenance" (Gen 12: 5). Here, the author uses the plural form to the Lot's household. According to Ancient Near East tradition, the household consists of man's wife, children and servants. So this text indicates two separate families. Regarding Abraham's return from Egypt to Canaan, it is stated: "And Abraham went out of Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him" (Gen 13: 1). Here, the singular form is used. Lot is considered to be part of one family. ¹¹ He is one among the household, and not as a separate family.

When they departed from Haran, Lot was an integral part of the family and their sustenance or property was evidently held in common. When they came back out of Egypt, however, we are confronted with the existence of two separate families. Lot, the nephew of Abraham was no longer mentioned immediately as part of the family, but someone who has attached himself to the group and accompanied them in an individual capacity. ¹² According to U. Cassuto, the omission of Lot in the first section is because of the literary method of Genesis. It was not necessary to mention Lot. It was essential not to refer to him also. But in the second section, Lot begins to be personally significant, since it is necessary to prepare the ground for the account of his separation from Abraham. The second idea is that Lot was mentioned in order to show not one of Abraham's household was detained in Egypt. ¹³

This is good example of how the narrative arises out of a situation. It is the steady increase of the property of both with the implication that it is the blessing at work that brings the increase. In enumerating the details, a clear distinction is drawn between the property of Lot and that of the wealth of Abraham. Abraham had possessed with cattle, silver and gold (v. 2). Lot's sustenance is purely nomadic: sheep, cattle and tents (v. 5). Later part of the chapter will also deal with other aspects such as temperament, character and values.

"The herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle" (v. 7a) is the beginning of the action, while v. 5 forms the exposition. The significance of this narrative becomes comprehensible only when it is realized that small nomadic groups cannot wage war. The war takes the place of the battle in which the larger unions from tribes engage. The war is concerned with living space and sustenance, as in war in later times, and is just as serious because it is a question of the very existence of the group. This leads to the conclusion that the quarrel narrative was once a highly developed type; only fragment of it are preserved in the patriarchal stories.

It gives a sign that this quarrel type of narrative tells us only of the result of the quarrel, and not of the quarrel itself.¹⁴

"The Canaanites and the Perizzites were then living in the land" (v. 7b): There is a quarrel between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. It is a kind of quarrel which arises between semi-nomadic pastoral groups, namely rights over grazing. The quarrel might be for good pasture and good water. One area can accommodate limited number of sheep and cattle. We see in Gen 36: 6-7: Jacob and Esau part company for a similar reason, although, there is no mention of any quarrel. Here, the problem is intensified by the fact that Abraham and Lot were not the only people living in the land. The presence of Canaanites and the Perizzites had intensified the conflict.¹⁵

When something goes wrong or goes against the plan, the elder from the group or family proffers the solution. Abraham, being the elder as well as the head of the whole group, proposes the solution to the problem. It showed his sense of responsibility towards others. He was interested in others wellbeing. The situation made him to do something immediately, or else the consequence will lead to a tragedy. He never compromised the basic principles of life. Here, we could see how Abraham reacts to the problem. There are three parts to the proposal which Abraham made to Lot.

In v. 8a, we see the unwillingness of Abraham to quarrel.

In v. 8b, Abraham negotiated with Lot to solve the problem.

In v. 9, Abraham proposed the solution to Lot.

Abraham's approach was not only positive that the conflict could be amicably solved, but also, his attitude showed his responsibility in times of troubles and difficulties. Most interpreters speak here of Abraham's nobility and readiness for a peaceful settlement. The quarrel between the shepherds threatened the existence of both groups. It is a question of living space and sustenance. Abraham does not make his proposal as an individual; rather he is responsible for his family and people. He comes to a decision in view of the life and well-being of his group. In order to avoid at all cost a violent outcome to the quarrel, because this would not accord with Abraham's responsibility for his kinsmen, he made the proposal. Here too Abraham is the father.¹⁶

As the head of the family, Abraham might have chosen his own portion first. He has the right as a patriarch, but he let Lot choose first. He had a parental affection for his nephew. His intentions and feelings for Lot were pure. So he permitted him to make his choice first. Abraham intended only peace between them.¹⁷ He showed them magnanimity.

Here, left and right may be used simply to indicate opposite directions. Left may mean North, and right may mean South.¹⁸ It is essential to note that the increase in property of both subgroups could lead to the increase in strength of the groups as a whole. Abraham sees that there can be a peaceful solution to the quarrel only if they separate peacefully. This is a certain indication that the groups of nomadic shepherds were viable only as small units. The reason Abraham said *for we are brothers*, is to be understood from the patriarchal point of view. Responsibility for one's brother can express itself in a solution to a quarrel which results in a peaceful separation.¹⁹ When peaceful community is impossible, scripture prefers amicable separation. Abraham insisted Lot share the Promised Land with him, either to take the right or the left.²⁰

There is a proverb: united we stand, divided we fall. Unity brought them prosperity and wealth. The same wealth brought division among them. This part explains the separation between Abraham and Lot. We have already made contrast between Abraham and Lot based on wealth. But this part explains the two different views on one object namely 'land'. The object is one, but Abraham and Lot look at land with different views. It showed their nature.

What he saw moved him to his decision. This is the climax of the narrative. Lot looked upon the land and staked his claim on what appeared to be the best. The land of his choice was well watered, making it ideal for his flocks and herds. It flourished with beautiful gardens and established cities. Lot likely believed the portion provided the greatest opportunity to increase his substance. It is this that resolved the tension, as it persuades him to accept Abraham's proposal and so end the quarrel. The Jordan plain that lies before him becomes something marvelous, arousing desire.

An Account of Restructuring

Restructuring: According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (9th ed.) defines restructuring as "organizing something such as a system or a company in a new and different way". What this means is that restructuring entails alteration and re-organization of an existing system in a way. According to Obiora Okonkwo, to restructure is to change an existing *status quo* in order to make it more functional.²¹ Deductive from his assertion is that restructuring is a purpose-driven activity that hinges on replacement of an existing nature of a system with a new one that will be suitable to achieve the purpose of the system. In view of this, restructuring is operationally seen in this paper as a significant alteration, re-organization, reformation and re-arrangement of an existing structuring, form or *status quo* in a revolutionary or evolutionary manner, with the aim

of making it more improved, effective, efficient and functionally competent.

Political restructuring: This has had different meanings as it has been a topic on the paper of most scholars with varying perspectives. According to Ahmed, Norafidah and Knocks, political restructuring entails both political re-configuration of the country and devolution of powers to the constituent units as it is practiced in other climes. To Najakku, it is the re-organization and re-arrangement of the nature of resource control by the various governments and regions. Be it as it may, political restructuring in the context of this paper entails the systemic reform and re-organization of the existing political structure in the nature of practice and in the way it relates to the social and economic dimensions of the polity be it in governance and resource control or otherwise.

Resource control: There is no agreed definition of resource control amongst scholars because of the wide spectrum of its usage in many different literatures. In the words of Arowolo, "resource control refers to the process by which component units in a federation are allowed to control their human and material resources for the purpose of accomplishing sustainable development for their people"²² This definition holds that resource control is the direct management of resources within a geopolitical entity. This is because, resource control is a responsibility that can be taken by any government, and be it the national and / or the sub-national government as far as the said resources is within its geopolitical jurisdiction.

Restructuring in Nigeria: Deductions from Gen. 13:7-12

The Need for Political Restructuring of the Nigerian State: An Analytical Discourse

Over the years and in recent times, many scholars, elites and average Nigerians have been clamouring for restructuring. Many questions have been asked and people tend to seek justification for their arguments on restructuring. Others claim that those who clamour for political restructuring do so for the benefit of their own self-interest. Hence, the latter addresses the former as the sub-optimalists of the current political structure - federalism. However, the case may be, one thing sacrosanct is that Nigerian federalism is observable only on paper, as in practice what the country has at best is pseudo-federalism since there exist unitary practices within the federalism. Little wonder, Kingsley Moghalu referred to the Nigerian political structure as the feeding bottle federalism.²³ Some

of these ill-federalist practices are outlined below in question format as a catalyze-able justification for restructuring the political structure of the country so as to move it from being the so called "feeding bottle federalism" to a more advanced, better and improved political structure that would be able to accommodate the varying interests of all the ethno-regional groups and levels of government, getting them satisfied and bonded together in unity without any form of marginalization or agitation for secession.

Diverse ethnic groups of about 371 in number will be fully represented, to negotiate in agreement or disagreement of the unification of all ethnic groups in Nigeria under one single political structure. This, in all ramifications, is a need to politically restructure the country otherwise, Nigeria would continue to be what Chief Obafemi Awolowo called it: a mere geographical expression. This is because the trending problem of Nigerian political structure as expressed by Ojukwu is rooted in our fear of unity. There is an unequivocal need for political restructuring of the Nigerian state as observable from the above analytical discourse. Also observable is that there have been previous attempts made towards the restructuring of the Nigerian state. Why then is it that no impact has been felt? What factor is inhibiting and challenging the restructuring of the pseudo-federalist structure of Nigeria? This paper, in an attempt to do justice to these questions, has outlined and buttressed below the factors that are responsible for the unresponsiveness and fruitlessness of political restructuring struggle in Nigeria. These factors amongst others include:

Elite interest: This appears to be a major problem facing political restructuring of Nigeria. The politico-economic elites of the country, who are favored in one way or the other by the existing political structure of Nigeria, influence negatively the struggle for political restructuring. These set of people constitute the wealthy, the politicians and even some elected government officials. According to Ujah and Agbakwuru, one of the reasons the Northerners shun the call for political restructuring is because of their landmass and population which grant the Northern political elites the opportunity of being appointed in large numbers into government position.²⁴ Also, in the words of the former Governor of Akwa-Ibom state, Obong Victor Attah as cited in Ujah & Agbakwuru "No governor today will lift a finger or put himself out to diversify or second restructuring when every month he can come to Abuja to collect his share of the booty. The only reason he would do so is if he knows that the survival of his state depends on it".²⁵ This outrightly shows that the call for restructuring has fallen to the dictates of the politico-economic elites of the Nigerian society.

Thus, they become stumbling blocks of the bid to restructure the pseudo-federalist political structure of Nigeria.

Fear of domination: This is another problem of political restructuring in Nigeria. Ojukwu asserted that the problem with Nigeria is rooted in the fear of unity between the ethnic constituents of the country.²⁶ This fear is predicated on the nature of allowing one ethnic group to dominate and is prevalent amongst the Northern region of Nigeria.

Political idiosyncrasy: The political ideology of most of the politicians and citizens of Nigeria is one that is based on sub-optimism. By this, they are only concerned with their own self-interest and not concerned about the interest of all other people living within a scattered population. Hence, their fight for or against restructuring will depend on how it will affect their self-interest even at the detriment of others.

Military incursion: The effect of military incursion on Nigerian politics at the early age of Nigerian independence is till date an inhibitor of political restructuring. The incursion of the military into the politics of Nigeria enhanced the fear of domination in Nigeria which in no little way has challenged the political restructuring of the Nigerian state. Similarly, the military constitution which is unitary in nature was imposed on Nigeria following democratic transition and was made written and rigid despite its non-federalist nature.

Corruption: This is an *anguis in herba*— a snake conveniently hidden in the grassland of Nigeria social scene. The struggle for political restructuring has seen shades of manifestation of corruption in different dimensions. There are corrupt officials who are but political restructuring entrepreneurs using the call for political restructuring as a way to gain favour from the government or gain recognition. Once they achieve this, they end their call and move towards discouraging the call for political restructuring in Nigeria. Typical examples are Asari Dokubo, Ralph Uwazurike and others who ended their struggle for political restructuring of Nigeria when they gained recognition and favour from the government.

Fear of suppression: This is seen on the part of the citizens. The struggle for political restructuring is not meant only for the nationalist groups, the politicians, scholars and elites but for all the citizens. Observable is that one the reasons for the non-involvement of some citizens in the struggle

for political restructuring is the undemocratic use of the military to suppress political restructuring agitators.

Citizenry *laissez-faire* attitude: This is another inhibitor of political restructuring in Nigeria. The Nigerian citizens as a result of fear of suppression, ignorance, corrupt mindset and politicization exhibits lackluster and carefree attitude towards the struggle for political restructuring of Nigeria federalism.

The nature of the existing structure: The nature of the existing political structure of Nigeria is one that has an adversary effect on the restructuring struggle. This existing political structure is one that has a rigid constitution that makes it hard for restructuring to be effected. Similarly, the existing political structure of the Nigerian Federation allocated more land mass and population to the northern region of the country.

Ethno-regional rivalry: The issue of ethno-regional rivalry in Nigeria is an age-long one that till date is militating against political restructuring of the Nigerian state. Following the rivalry among the ethno-regional nationalities in Nigeria emanating from development, resource concentration and resource allocation with a matching fear of domination, the ethno-regional bodies (especially the southern and northern region) have failed to come to agreement on restructuring.

Nigerian Political Restructuring: The Way Forward

The issue of political restructuring in Nigeria is one that needs to be addressed because it is long overdue for restructuring. One can see no insistence on right to grazing land on the part of Abraham. He let Lot choose first. This selfless act can be emulated in proffering a solution to the crisis. Abraham did not lay any claim on grazing right. So also the herdsmen in Nigeria should not lay claim even though freedom of movement is established in the Nigerian constitution. Since these paths, routes and lands, belong to some communities, the herdsmen should be sensitive to the fears and insecurities of these ancestral communities. Large expanse of the nation lies fallow without the prospect of heir put it to productive use. An example in point is the Sambisa forest which has been said by Oby Ezekweli to be eighteen (18) times the size of Lagos, the government should make the Sambisa forest one of the best cattle ranches in the whole Northern Nigeria.

The herdsmen should be given lands in the fallow land of Sambisa and experts in animal husbandry from across the world should be invited to

transfer their expertise to the cattle herders. The case in point is the white Zimbabwe farmers who are presently in Shonga Farms in Kwara state. Systems of irrigation can be employed to provide water for the cattle security apparatuses should be provided to stem issue of cattle rustling which is presently on the increase. By staying in their natural environment the herdsmen would have no need to constantly trained south in search of water and pasture. Communal clashes with natures will decrease so also banditry.

The natural suspicion that characterizes the relationship between both herdsmen and farmers would be a thing of the past. The herdsmen would be with their people who share the same culture, heritage and inclinations and proclivities. Government will also do well to improve rail transportation to these areas, thereby boosting trade and economic activities along the route. The cattle can also be taken to the four corner of the nation by the integrated rail system. With necessary amenities provided at the Sambisa forest, the quality and quantity of cattle would rival those of countries like Australia, Argentina and the USA. These countries do not herd their cattle from place to place but in ranches. Cattles do not need to trek hundreds of kilometer in other to eat and drink. Lots of energy is expended by the cattle and the herdsmen on the road. Conversely, the ranching method conserve energy, thereby making the cattle fresh and producing much and quality milk. However, the above scenarios can only come to fruition if, and only if, Abraham selflessness and maturity can be put into practice by the herders and farmers. It takes maturity to put others' interest first.

Therefore, in a bid to tackle the hydra-headed monster impeding the political restructuring of Nigeria and in order to facilitate the birth of a new and improved political structure that will be suitable to the current civilization of Nigeria and ease the country of the tensions and conflicts emanating from pseudo-federalist practice, this paper recommends the following:

1. The country should be re-federalized in such a way that the psuedo-federal practices observed within this paper are abrogated.
2. The political structure of Nigeria should be made cooperative federalism instead of pseudo-federalism so that the ethno-regional entities interests would be mutually integrated in the formation of a serene sociopolitical structured Nigeria.
3. The Nigerian government institutions should be re-strengthened in such a way that are viable in their performance and impenetrable by corruption so that they can easily implement political restructuring should it be adopted.

4. The entire citizens of Nigeria irrespective of tribe or region of origin should be value re-oriented and psychologically engineered towards understanding the need for both unity in their diversities and the advantage a politically restructured country has in transforming into an egalitarian society. This will also make them to change their laissez-faire attitude and embark on a nationalistic call for restructuring without fear of suppression.
5. The Nigerian constitution should be abolished and re-enacted following a democratic process to lay the foundation for true federalism in practice, with sufficient citizenry consultation and referendum.
6. There should be periodic constitutional review and conference (at least every five years) involving all ethno-regional entities and states of the federation to assess the functionality of the Nigerian federalism and integrate the interests of the minorities in governance.
7. The contents of all the legislative lists should be updated and made to reflect the coordinate nature of all levels of government.
8. There should be equal representation of all ethno-regional entities in all affairs of the country especially in the appointment of people into government offices.
9. There should be a criminalization of pseudo-federalist practices and anyone attempting it should be severely punished.
10. The state government should be allowed to engage in their own policing to ensure effective security of lives and properties.
11. The country should be structured to have regional equality in the number of states and local governments, land mass and population.
12. There should be meritocratic adherence to the principles of federal character of the country and not using it as an instrument of favouritism for any region of the country.
13. The state governments of the country should have ultimate right to exploit and utilize the resources within their territorial domain and remit taxes to the federal government.
14. The states of the federation which have other mineral resource other than oil should also be included in the operation of the derivation principle.

Conclusion

The issue of restructuring Nigerian political landscape is a topical issue that trends. No matter how one wants to elude it, this issue requires a quality interest and addressing. Therefore, this paper urges all Nigerians and their leaders to stop playing the ostrich on the issue of restructuring the

Nigerian political structure. A joint effort towards restructuring the Nigerian federalism will make Nigeria a better country where needless tensions and conflicts are minimal and where the sub-national governments are not reduced to mere appendages. Therefore, to achieve this, urgent steps should be taken in the execution of the recommendations of this paper so as to change the status quo to one that will work despite the multifarious ethnic-regional nationalities in the country.

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