

LEADERSHIP AS A VIRTUE-BASED APPROACH TO JUST PEACE ETHIC IN NIGERIA:
ENDSARS PROTEST AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: This article analyzes the End SARS movement in Nigeria from the perspective of leadership and virtue ethics for sustainable peace. It explains how youth-led, nonviolent protests against police brutality and government oppression highlighted the limits of leaderless resistance. The author argues that while virtues such as compassion, empathy, justice, and patience are essential for building peace, effective leadership is a vital thread that binds these virtues and makes societal change and lasting peace possible. Instead of force, virtue-based leadership is proposed as a solution to transform conflict, bridge gaps, and establish just peace in Nigeria.

Keywords: Leadership, Virtue ethics, just peace, Nonviolent resistance, End SARS Protest, Nigeria Youth movement social change, Peacebuilding, Empathy, Compassion, Justice, Sustainable peace

1.0. Introduction

Violence is prevalent in Nigeria: terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, ritual killing, domestic violence, cybercrime etc., and the perpetrators are predominantly young people. I found out that young people are the victims of their own violence. This is to the extent that even those who are nonviolent among them are erroneously punished for the violence committed by others – police brutality which is another form of violence. This often leads to feelings of frustration and nonviolent resistance by young people. While the violent approach used by the government to address such nonviolent demonstrations is not helpful because it only leads to more violence, I argue in this paper that leaderless resistance by young people makes conflict resolutions and peacebuilding difficult and unsustainable. Such was what happened during the EndSARS protest by the Nigerian youth in 2020.

Ordinary citizens can transform their governments with great effect by using nonviolent resistance. It may be possible for people and organizations dealing with repressive, authoritarian, or restrictive systems of governance to use nonviolent strategies to raise awareness of their concerns, question existing power structures, and demand changes. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan observed that nonviolent civil resistance is significantly more effective than violent campaigns at bringing about widespread change in their book “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict.”¹

Scholarly research has shown that, despite their higher likelihood of success, nonviolent movements do not always succeed and that many eventually become violent. Consequently, certain nonviolent movements are unable to make headway. One of such is leaderless resistance. More precisely, in Nigeria, a nonviolent demonstration by a variety of interest groups against several major issues – such as the country's rising rates of unemployment and inflation, the unequal distribution of palliative care, growing insecurity, and the abuses of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) officials in some regions – turned violent after the police used tear gas and live ammunition to

¹ Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan. “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict (Columbia University Press, 2011).

disperse the leaderless demonstrators.²

Eli McCarthy's virtue-based approach to a just peace ethic lacks adequate attention to leadership as a virtue, even though he has called for rectification of political leadership with the use of a just peace ethic.³ Hence, this paper seeks to propose leadership as a virtue for effective and sustainable peacebuilding among young people.

2.0. The End SARS Protest

In 2020, mass protests against police brutality in Nigeria were organized by the decentralized social movement End SARS. The movement's catchphrase demanded the end of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a controversial Nigerian Police squad with a lengthy history of abusing Nigerian residents.⁴ Young Nigerians, primarily men, were allegedly profiled by SARS personnel on the basis of their hairstyles, tattoos, and fashion choices. Aside from raping women, they were also known to erect illegal roadblocks, carry out unauthorized checks and searches, make arrests and hold people without a warrant or trial, and blackmail young male Nigerians for using laptops and iPhones and driving expensive cars.⁵ Stories and video proof of SARS police abducting, killing, robbing, torturing, raping, unlawfully detaining, humiliating, extrajudicially killing, and extorting Nigerian nationals were circulated by Nigerians. A significant portion of the SARS abuse victims were young, male Nigerians.⁶

The demonstrations started as a result of a 2017 Twitter campaign demanding that the Nigerian government dissolve the unit with the hashtag #EndSARS.⁷ After more information about the unit's abuses came to light in October 2020, the movement saw a rebirth that resulted in large-scale protests in Nigeria's major cities and a great deal of criticism on social media. On Twitter alone, the hashtag #EndSARS garnered almost 28 million tweets.⁸ Numerous major cities worldwide witnessed protests and demonstrations of solidarity led by Nigerians living abroad and their supporters. Notably, the movement was predominantly led by young Nigerians⁹ and grew to include calls for accountability and good government in the face of the nation's unheard-of hardship.

Following a few days of demonstrations, the Nigerian Police Force declared on October 11, 2020, that the unit would be dissolved immediately. Many saw the action as a victory for the protesters.¹⁰ It was pointed out, meanwhile, in numerous places that the government had only intended to reassign and review SARS personnel rather than disbanding the unit completely, and that similar pronouncements had been made in previous years to appease the public without the unit being eliminated completely.¹¹ As a result, protests persisted, and the Nigerian government continued its policy of violent repression, which included killing protesters.¹² International protests in

² Allwell Raphael Uwazuruike. "#EndSARS: The Movement Against Police Brutality in Nigeria", *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 2020.

³ Eli McCarthy and Leo Lushombo. "Rectifying Political Leadership Through a Just Peace Ethic", *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2019): 122-139.

⁴ Omonobi Kingsley and Joseph Erunke. "Anti-SARS campaign: IG orders investigation of anti-robbery squad". *Vanguard, Nigeria*, 2017.

⁵ Yomi Kazeem. "Young Nigerians are leading protests yet again to disband a rogue police unit". *Quartz Africa*, 2020.

⁶ "People's Experiences at the hands of SARS". *EndSARS (unofficial website)*, 2020.

⁷ Aisha Salaudeen. "Nigerians want police's SARS force scrapped". *Al Jazeera*. Archived from the original on 2 January 2018. Retrieved 2 January 2018.

⁸ Yomi Kazeem. "How a youth-led digital movement is driving Nigeria's largest protests in a decade". *Quartz Africa*. Archived from the original on 13 October 2020. Retrieved 13 October 2020.

⁹ Stephanie Busari. "Nigeria's youth find its voice with the EndSARS protest movement". *CNN*. Archived from the original on 27 October 2020. Retrieved 25 October 2020.

¹⁰ "#EndSARS: Nigeria says Special Anti-Robbery Squad dissolved". *Al Jazeera*. 11 October 2020. Archived from the original on 11 October 2020. Retrieved 11 October 2020.

¹¹ Niji Ademoroti. "What It Means When the Police Say They are Dissolving SARS". *BellaNaija*. Archived from the original on 11 October 2020. Retrieved 11 October 2020.

¹² Ifeoluwa Adediran. "Another #EndSARS protester shot dead". *Premium Times Nigeria*. Archived from the original on 13 October 2020. Retrieved 12 October 2020.

support of those within the nation took place, and the movement grew more and more critical of President Muhammadu Buhari administration's handling of the demonstrations.¹³

3.0. Nonviolent Approaches during the End SARS Protest

During this memorable protest, the Nigerian youth demonstrated nonviolence. They insistently protested every day for many days. They did this at strategic places in major cities across the country with the most prominent one happening in Lagos which is the most populous city in Nigeria. They demonstrated solidarity; the demonstrators did not only comprise those who had been victimized by the police in the past, but also those who had never been abused. Every young person saw the need to identify with victims of violence. Musicians, actors, comedians, religious leaders, human rights activists etc. were seen at the scene of the protest, identifying with these young people. Some of them spent nights at the protest ground, only to wake up the following day and continue the protest. Some young people, especially female ones, cooked food and brought it for protesters. They even shared food and drinks with police officers during the protest.

In addition, even if there was a potential of success, the youths' decentralized leadership style made it impossible for the government to negotiate peace with all the groups because no one person or professional activist led the internet or offline protests. The idea behind this kind of leaderless protest was that since well-known leaders are likely to go to jail or be assassinated, they have to be shielded. The buildings were impromptu and haphazardly put together. Clearly, this form of setup has its challenges: too many local leaders and groups engender contradictory messages and the employment of techniques that are not supported by all parties, despite the fact that these protests are rarely infiltrated and corrupted by the government and are frequently driven by technology.¹⁴ Over time, they lose their meaning and become unsustainable. Therefore, following a few weeks of social media and in-person protests, organizing, leading, and sustaining momentum dwindled. Even while a large number of celebrities and social media influencers attended the actual protests, they were not thought to be the movement's long-term leaders or advocates.

Leaderless resistance has been employed by a wide range of movements, including animal-liberation, radical environmentalist, anti-abortion, military invasion resistance, anarchist organizations, colonialism resistance, terrorist, and hate groups.¹⁵ Clayborne Carson opines that leaderless, decentralized protests are both a strength and a weakness. He adds that “unless goals are made clear by an articulate spokesperson, the movement may lose control of its messaging.” He argues that there needs to be some kind of leadership stating objectives of the movement.¹⁶ Otherwise, such protests would be hijacked and lead to violence.

The violence that broke out on October 21, 2020, was the unmitigated cost of the leaderless #EndSARS demonstration. Furthermore, it seems that the government hired hoodlums to take over the protest in order to criminalize the movement. As a result of the demonstration being made illegal, the cause lost support on a national and worldwide level. Therefore, there were legitimate grounds for the government to compel the state to put an end to the demonstration. Curfews were imposed in several movement states after that. It was challenging to tell the difference between the lawless protestors and the thugs who ransacked government buildings, retail establishments, and both public and private warehouses. The administration also called off the protests in an effort to put an end to the thugs and bring back peace and order.

4.0. Transforming Violence with Virtue-based Just Peace Ethic

Just peace cannot be achieved without virtue. Living a life in accordance with virtue and engaging in virtuous relationships are necessary for human wellbeing. Being virtuous entails possessing a group of connected qualities

¹³ Tami Makinde. “#EndSARS protests in Nigeria show that the youth want change, now”. *gal-dem*. Archived from the original on 17 October 2020. Retrieved 19 October 2020.

¹⁴ Chioma Deborah Onwubiko and Favour Ogemdi Egwim. “The Pragmatics of Political Claims and Social Responses amidst Covid19 and EndSARS Saga in Nigeria”, *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, Vol.3, No. 4, 2021.

¹⁵ Paul Joosse. “Leaderless Resistance and Ideological Inclusion: the Case of the Earth Liberation Front”. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. 19 (3): 2007, 351–368.

¹⁶ <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2020/06/leaderless-protest-strength-weakness>

that allow one to live and act properly, as opposed to only performing a proximate good, which is a morally good deed. According to William Spohn, virtue is an attitude toward acting, desiring, and feeling that entails using judgment and results in a distinguishable human quality, or an instance of human flourishing.¹⁷ Through paradigmatic or fundamental practices, virtues are actualized and developed.

A virtue-based approach, for example, might assist us in concentrating on cultivating the virtue, good habits, and character that match with a just peace ethic. It is influenced by the gospels and intersects with African traditions. For instance, the Yoruba people of Nigeria are known as “omoluabis”, meaning the virtuous people. This is because they are known to uphold virtues, especially those ones which enhance harmonious relationship between them and others. That is why virtually every virtue thought by the Bible has its equivalence in Yoruba proverbs and wise sayings. A virtue-based approach, in Eli McCarthy’s opinion, would enhance the growth of character and the kind of imagination that engages and imaginatively applies, expands, and even rectifies some of the practices of existing just peacemaking theories. Furthermore, a virtue-based approach has the tendency to better equip us to transform not only direct violence but also structural and cultural violence.¹⁸ Johan Galtung defined cultural violence as the aspects of culture that can be used to legitimize direct or structural violence.¹⁹ Therefore, a virtue-based strategy would also develop people who would more effectively marginalize and discredit the use of violence.

McCarthy submits that maintaining the virtue of nonviolence is congruent with non-Catholic leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Mahatma Gandhi, and it also builds upon the Catholic trajectory, which makes it widely acceptable.²⁰ Nonviolence is essential because it is a practice of appreciating the benefits of conciliation, which pulls adversaries toward friendship, as well as the reality of our ultimate oneness and equal dignity.

Corresponding practices to develop and actualize nonviolence as a virtue include prayer and meditation, which for some involves composing and reciting an optional Eucharistic prayer that explicitly references Jesus’ love of enemies; education and training in nonviolent peacemaking and resistance, including establishing nonviolent communities; interfaith and intrareligious dialogue; positive social uplift programs that target the impoverished and marginalized in particular; conflict transformation analysis and restorative justice approaches; participating in nonviolent resistance and disruption movements; unarmed civilian protection; and nonviolent civilian-based defense.²¹

One key to comprehending the efficacy and strategic potential of nonviolent resistance is to view conflict as potentially creative and productive. According to Gene Sharp, nonviolent resistance organizations should strategically concentrate on identifying the main sources of power and pillars supporting repressive regimes.²² With this strategy, the oppressor's power can be shifted away from them and the resistance can accomplish its political objectives without the oppressor experiencing a “change of heart.” History has shown that this has been effective against extremely brutal leaders.²³ Actually, nonviolent resistance movements in the modern era have been twice as successful as violent revolutions in accomplishing their political goals, according to new study. More revealing still, effective nonviolent uprisings have more frequently resulted in “durable democracies” than in supposed successful violent revolutions.²⁴ The effectiveness of such nonviolent resistance movements would be

¹⁷ William Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 28.

¹⁸ Isabel Wilkerson. “Mike Brown’s Shooting and Jim Crow Lynching Have Too Much in Common: It’s Time for America to Own Up,” *Guardian*, August 25, 2014.

¹⁹ Johan Galtung. “Cultural Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1990, 291-305.

²⁰ Eli S. McCarthy ed. *A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 58.

²¹ Emmanuel McCarthy. *The Nonviolent Eucharistic Jesus: A Pastoral Approach* (Wilmington, DE: Center for Christian Nonviolence, 2011); Miguel De La Torre, *Latina/o Social Ethics: Moving beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 97-105; McCarthy, *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers*, 187-206.

²² Gene Sharp. *How Nonviolent Struggle Works* (East Boston, MA: Albert Einstein Institute, 2013), 5-6.

²³ Gene Sharp. *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005).

²⁴ Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan. *Why Civilian Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 7, 213-14.

considerably greater if they were combined with the virtue of nonviolent peacemaking, particularly in terms of long-lasting democracy and, more importantly, a just and sustainable peace.

In order to provide unarmed civilian protection, an outsider must enter a conflict as a neutral party, show sympathy for both sides, refrain from employing force, and work to diffuse tensions in order to foster peacebuilding and reconciliation. This tried-and-true method encompasses strategies like physical interposition, proactive engagement with armed actors, monitoring and documentation, modeling nonviolent behavior, facilitating the connection of locals to national and international resources, offering safe spaces free from violence or conducive to restorative dialogue, and more.²⁵

Using nonviolent resistance to fend against military invasion, occupation, or coups d'état is known as civilian-based defense. For example, the resisters may not always keep the troops from invading their land. However, the majority of people take part in the resistance in some capacity, taking charge of their own defense rather than leaving it to the hands of a select few.²⁶ This basically means refusing to follow important directives from the adversary and maybe establishing rival organizations or governments, to the extent that it becomes difficult or impossible for the invading army to gain an advantage or even remain. Over the course of the last century, civilian-based defense has evolved into many various forms and has been incorporated into defense planning by certain governments. Historical instances comprise the opposition in 1923 to Wolfgang Kapp's attempted coup d'état in Germany, the opposition in Norway and Denmark against German occupation during World War II, the resistance in Czechoslovakia against Soviet occupation in 1968, the Baltic countries in 1990-1991, and the Philippines in 1986. By funding research and development to produce peaceful means of preventing military occupation, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, and Lithuania have integrated civilian-based defense into their defense strategies.²⁷

Active nonviolence, or nonviolent peacemaking, would also qualify important qualities like courage and justice and elevate other associated virtues like hospitality, solidarity, empathy, humility, compassion, and mercy. For example, according to Thomas Aquinas, the virtue of mercy is the most important one that binds a person to their neighbor. Mercy is “promoting and drawing the good from all the forms of evil existing in the world,” according to Pope John Paul II.²⁸ Jim Keenan, SJ, describes mercy as the willingness to enter into the chaos of another so as to answer them in their need.²⁹ Becoming present, listening, and taking into account the needs of people—such as meaning, connection, autonomy, and sustenance—all contribute to and foster the virtue of mercy. By giving the players a sense of gift and creating a wider window or receptivity for God's love, mercy predisposes one to let go of the tension and possessiveness of circumstances. In order to perfect the fairness of a proper relationship and create a thriving partnership, mercy entails a risk of pain, suffering, and even death.³⁰

Aquinas was advised by the virtue of humility to honor others for what they had from God. Knowing one's place and eschewing the extremes of dominance, pride, and self-deprecation are what Keenan defines as humility.³¹ According to Haring, the first source of humility is our creature-status, or the fact that we were born into this world with all of its limitations and reliance. It also means appreciating the dignity that God has given us, along with our abilities and capabilities. Being humble makes it easier for people to forgive and receive forgiveness. Because it lays the foundation for the whole edifice of Christian virtue, humility is seen by Haring as a cardinal virtue.³² Negotiations and diplomatic efforts would therefore be more inclusive of important stakeholders like “extremist” groups and civil society, more willing to acknowledge wrongs done, more open to trauma-healing

²⁵ Eli S. McCarthy ed. *A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 59.

²⁶ Michael Nagler. *Is There No Other Way? The Search for a Nonviolent Future* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Hills Books, 2001), 252-53.

²⁷ Gene Sharp. *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005), 516.

²⁸ Pope John Paul II. “Rich in Mercy,” November 30, 1980.

²⁹ Jim Keenan. *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 124.

³⁰ Eli S. McCarthy ed. *A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 60.

³¹ Jim Keenan and Daniel Harrington. *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 191.

³² Bernard Haring. *The Law of Christ* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1961), 546-47, 551.

processes to better enable sustainable agreements, and more sensitive to the real needs of all parties.

Additionally, empathy and compassion would gain importance. According to Chris Vogt, compassion is a virtue that stresses the affective dimension and concentrates on the suffering of particular individuals. He contends that it is therefore necessary in order to be able to cultivate the virtue of solidarity.³³ Being loved and forgiven by God, according to Lisa Cahill, inspires a determination to live out God's rule “so fully that mercy, forgiveness, and compassion precludes the very contemplation” of harming another person.³⁴ She claims that love is more than just an emotion in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, and that love entails paradigmatic actions like recognizing the specific needs of both offenders and victims.³⁵ As a result, she disputes the idea that we can love our adversaries and still kill them.³⁶

The virtue of empathy, which is the ability to sense and imagine what other people are going through—not just their pain, but also their joy, amazement, and gifts—complements compassion. Reflective listening, asking the right questions to stimulate social and personal growth, and recognizing the needs and feelings of all parties, particularly in conflict situations, are practices that support the development and expression of empathy. Similar to compassion, the development of the completeness of solidarity likewise depends on the virtue of empathy.

Pope John Paul II, defined the virtue of solidarity as “a firm and preserving determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and each individual.”³⁷ This virtue results from Jesus' practice of giving the poor and marginalized people priority and from seeing that we are social beings who are interdependent and bonded to one another as well as to our shared home.³⁸ In order to change societal structures, “cultivating an awareness of the need to nurture a dialogical, mutually beneficial relationship with them” is a necessary step in developing the virtue of solidarity.³⁹ In circumstances of extreme conflict, we would provide tangible solidarity not only with those who are assaulted or whose fundamental human rights are infringed, but also with the poor and vulnerable who stand to lose the most if we decide to participate in both the planning and carrying out of war.

The goal of the virtue of hospitality is to accept and frequently bring back to the community family and friends, the outsider or misfit, the enemy, the vulnerable and immature, other animals, and the gift of creation in its whole.⁴⁰ Providing water and basic necessities to the undocumented, offering asylum to immigrants, establishing the social framework necessary to drastically reduce abortion rates, and meeting the fundamental requirements of all children are examples of corresponding actions.

According to Aquinas, the primary moral virtue that aims to establish proper relationships with others by giving what is rightfully due is justice. He brings up the virtues of praying for our adversaries and practicing nonmaleficence. Furthermore, he contends that the ultimate goal of human law should be human friendship.⁴¹ Social justice, as it relates to fostering equitable social institutions and the allocation of goods, is a virtue. Nonetheless, Christopher Marshall's critique of the scriptural evidence of justice combined with the virtue of nonviolent peacemaking would qualify the virtue of justice to concentrate more clearly on restorative justice with the ultimate goal of friendship.⁴² The main goal of restorative justice would be to mend hurts so that people can rejoin society and uphold their fundamental human rights.

³³ Christopher Vogt. “The Common Good and Virtue Ethics,” in *Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (2007): 403, 405.

³⁴ Lisa Sowle Cahill. *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1994), 2, 176-77.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁶ Lucas Chan. *Ten Commandments*, 233.

³⁷ John Paul II. “On Social Concern,” December 30, 1987, sect. 38, 40.

³⁸ Jon Sobrino. *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 90-91; David Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 189.

³⁹ Christopher Vogt. “The Common Good and Virtue Ethics,” in *Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (2007): 403, 405.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 412.

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae* I-II.Q57.a1-2; II-II.Q83.a8; III.Q99.a2.

⁴² Marshall. *Beyond Retribution*.

Because it is more difficult to suppress fear than to act violently, Aquinas believed that endurance rather than attack is where the virtue of courage most commonly manifests itself. As a result, martyrdom serves as its primary deed and best exemplifies the perfection of compassion.⁴³ According to Hauerwas, courage is having faith that God will carry out His plan for us even if our enemies kill us.⁴⁴ Pope Francis added that “peacemaking is much more courageous than warfare.”⁴⁵ The practice of suffering out of respect for the dignity of others (and oneself) by risking, possibly even surrendering, one’s life without killing, is another way that the virtue of nonviolent peacemaking enlarges or explains the archetypal practices of the virtue of courage. This is because, in part, murdering dehumanizes us by making us adopt a possessive and frequently dehumanizing logic in place of the logic of fearful gift and empathy.⁴⁶

As beautiful and effective as the virtues above may seem, one essential missing virtue is the virtue of good leadership, even though the above virtues are also virtues of a good leader. In the case of the EndSARS protest, both the government and the young protesters demonstrated bad leadership and lack of leadership respectively. Leadership is the cord which binds all the other virtues together. Without a leader, other virtues cannot be harmonized for productivity. Clayborne Carson asserts, “I think the main component of a peaceful and effective protest is some kind of leadership. Someone who can monitor, someone who can say ‘No, that’s not what we do here.’”⁴⁷

4.1 Role of Leadership as a Virtue-based Just Peace Ethic

Eli McCarthy claims that the just peace ethic offers norms that focus on three distinct yet overlapping categories. I will show how good leadership can harmonize all these virtues using the three categories.

1. Good leadership develops virtues and skill sets to engage conflict constructively (*jus in conflictione*): The virtues of mercy, compassion, empathy, humility, hospitality, solidarity, justice, courage, and nonviolent peacemaking (active nonviolence) are built by good leaders. These qualities all aid in better integrating or maintaining consistent means and ends; that is exactly what Sawatsky refers to as the principle of reflexivity. This category also includes a norm of sustaining spiritual disciplines, such as prayer that expressly names Jesus’ love of enemies and rejection of violent behavior.⁴⁸ Other norms include the formation of nonviolent peacemaking communities, organizations, and cultures; nonviolence education and training in skill sets such nonviolent communication and resistance; root cause analysis; and participatory procedures.⁴⁹ It is the duty of leaders at all levels – parents, teachers, political leaders, and religious leaders – to inculcate these virtues in younger ones; they can effectively do this through leadership by example.

One way to have demonstrated this during the EndSARS Protest was for the young protesters to be courageous enough to have leaders who would speak for them and present their needs before the government. The government, on the other hand, lacked the empathy and justice which good leaders must demonstrate.

2. Good leadership breaks cycles of violence (*jus ex bello*): Here, nonviolent resistance, which is more obstructive or uncooperative with injustice, and peacebuilding, which is more constructive, are the practices and transformative attempts to stop cycles of destructive conflict and violence. One important norm in this category is the norm of reflexivity. Nonviolent direct action is another norm. Examples include nonviolent citizen defense, unarmed civilian protection, and innovative nonviolent resistance to injustice. A further norm is to transform conflicts to bring opponents together in a cooperation to solve the underlying problems. This comprises the actions of taking ownership of one’s actions, recognizing each actor’s human needs, resolving trauma, and

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae* I-II.Q123.a6; I-II.Q124.a3.

⁴⁴ Stanley Hauerwas. *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1997), 161.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis. “Invocation for Peace,” June 8, 2014.

⁴⁶ Eli S. McCarthy ed. *A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 63.

⁴⁷ <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2020/06/leaderless-protest-strength-weakness>.

⁴⁸ Eli S. McCarthy ed. *A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), 67.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

upholding the law. What Pope Francis called “integral disarmament,” which focuses on drastically cutting back on weapons and the arms trade, is another norm.⁵⁰

The young protesters demonstrated these virtues until some sponsored hoodlums hijacked the protests from them and displayed violence. Again, this explains lack of good leadership on the part of the government. When unarmed civilians embark on peaceful protests, it is the duty of responsible governments, through the police, to protect them and prevent moles from infiltrating. In the case of the End SARS, it seemed that the government wanted the protest to turn violent in order to stop it altogether. That is not a good way to resolve a conflict; such a way only leads to more violence.

3. Good leadership builds sustainable peace (*jus as pacem*): This category comprises practices and laws that operate as standards for establishing enduring peace. This category includes the norm of relationality and reconciliation, which describes behaviors that build, foster, repair, and expand relationships in both horizontal and vertical directions throughout social contexts. Ecological justice and sustainability is another norm that asks us to support the long-term welfare of nonhuman animals, people, and the environment. By protecting human rights and fostering empathy for all actors, the standard of dignity and human rights advocates for behavior that is consistent with and enhances recognition of the equal dignity of all persons, even opponents.

When conflicts are over, it is the responsibility of leaders of the opposing sides to come together for reconciliation and sustainable peace. This is the time for true revelations as each side share its stories of pains and takes responsibility for their mistakes. When leaders are lacking, this cannot be attained.

5.0. Conclusion

It is my opinion that a virtue-based approach towards handling violence is more effective than using force. For instance, the End SARS Protest would not have ended up violently if the government had not resorted to the use of force to disperse the young protesters. Rather, the government would have built upon the virtue of nonviolence displayed by the young people by responding equally with nonviolence; this would have led to a sustainable peacebuilding in the country because it would have inculcated more virtues into the young people. However, I make bold to say that our challenge in Africa is not that of lack of virtues – we have virtues in abundance in our folklores, songs, myths, legends etc. – but we lack good leadership. Once we have political leaders who do what they promise and religious leaders who live what they preach, new crop of leaders would emerge among our young people who would transform violence into a sustainable peace.

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