
NEHEMIAH'S REFORM IN ISRAEL: A CHALLENGE FOR NATION-BUILDING

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Abstract

Nehemiah was one of the people who refused to return to Jerusalem after the exile. He had become an influential man through his connection with the palace in Persia. He was in the palace when he got the news that the wall of Jerusalem had broken down and its gates were burnt with fire. Out of patriotism, Nehemiah responded to the situation and found solution to it. In Nigeria today, the issue of nation building has become a mirage. For a country to experience nation building or sustainable development, both the leaders and the citizenry must possess the virtue of patriotism, which has become a scarce commodity in the Nigeria value market. This paper, therefore, examines, through historical-critical and exegetical analysis, Nehemiah's reform, which was carried out in Jerusalem and put the situation in context within the Nigeria socio-political, economic, and religious structures. This is with the aim of drawing out possible leadership and followership traits that are germane for nation building for both the leaders and citizens of Nigeria.

(Key Words: Nehemiah, Reform, Nation-Building, Jerusalem, Persia, Patriotism).

INTRODUCTION

On many occasions, the challenges to nation building or national development can be traced to bad leadership or what Ibrahim Gambari calls "leadership failings (Gambari, 2006)." Many of the Nigerian leaders – past and present – did not possess leadership qualities such as sincerity, honesty, transparency, accountability, etc., that are required and germane to nation building. The initiatives of the few ones that possess these qualities are being strangled by enormous number of the bad and corrupt leaders. This is coupled with the unpatriotic nature of the followers or citizenry. A large portion of the population has been infected by the corrupt practices of the leaders at the top. This attitude corroborates the saying that "when the head is sick, it affects the whole body also." It is against this backdrop that this paper examines a biblical leader named Nehemiah, who arose to the challenge of failing security among his people in a turbulent period. The paper focuses on some of the leadership traits demonstrated by Nehemiah in the course of his reform which, if majority of Nigerian leaders can

imbibe, will go a long way in solving many of the developmental challenges facing the country. The paper also looks at the response of the Jews to Nehemiah's vision and community project initiated by him with the view to challenging ordinary Nigerians to rise up to their responsibilities if they are actually desirous to see Nigeria achieving the re-branding slogan "Good People, Great Nation."

The above objectives will be achieved with the use of intercultural hermeneutical method. But what is intercultural hermeneutics? Intercultural hermeneutics has been described as one way of describing the process of doing contextual exegesis and theology for contemporary reascent persons, such as those in Africa today. It is not merely an exegesis that is solely influenced by its context (Inculturation); rather, it is a hermeneutics in which conscious analysis of the context is an integral part of the hermeneutical process. It is a method in biblical criticism, which is applicable to biblical texts in order to facilitate interpretation and appropriation of the meanings of God's self-disclosure in creation into another culture. It is a method that seeks to understand the message of God in a particular biblical text by comparing and contrasting the culture of the biblical author with that of the African reader of the Bible (Manus, 2003: 32-34). This methodology is chosen because it recognizes the fact that although the Bible reveals God's dealing with humankind, the message has been transmitted in Jewish, Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman cultures set in a different time and place quite foreign to African cultures and environment. This reality demands that the Bible be interpreted interculturally, that is, with the aid of other cultures so that non-western readers may not find its meaning obscure in their own life-worlds.

Louis C. Jonker describes the importance of the intercultural reading of the Bible in the following way:

The aim of intercultural reading of the Bible is to be exposed to the reading of the Bible by people in completely different cultural circumstances than your own. Intercultural Bible reading offers the opportunity to read through "the eyes of another," and to reflect on why you read the Bible similarly or differently. This is important because culture is perhaps one of the most dominant, yet least noticed and studied factors in the reading of the Bible. Culture also provides us with some criteria to compare interpretations of biblical texts in different cultural context. Apart from the more academic/theoretical reasons, we are interested in the intercultural reading of the Bible because we are convinced that it can facilitate a better understanding of the reading of others, and the dynamics of our own reading (Jonker, 2001).

Thus, intercultural hermeneutics allows for the interaction of biblical text with that of the recipient culture or situation with the intention of drawing out possible lessons from the Bible that could assist in solving a devastating or negative situation in the recipient immediate milieu.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO THE REFORM OF NEHEMIAH

The reform of Nehemiah is situated after the return of the Jews from exiles. It is to be noted that the two Kingdoms of Israel were taken into captivity – Northern kingdom in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians and the Southern kingdom in 598 B.C. by the Babylonians (Abe, 2005: 10-12). This was

followed by the destruction of the Temple, which was a symbol of Jewish identification with and total submission to Yahweh. However, unlike the northern kingdom, the southern kingdom was able to maintain its identity because of the religious toleration granted by Nebuchadnezzar's son and successor, Amel-Marduk, nicknamed Evil Merodach, to all the foreigners in his empire (Abe, 2005:12).

However, in 539 B.C.E., Cyrus II (the Great) King of Ashan, and founder of Persian Empire, captured Babylon in his expansion efforts. This automatically brought the southern kingdom of Israel under Persian rule. It was Cyrus the Great that granted both the citizens and exiles amnesty and religious toleration for hailing him as the liberator and deliverer. Thus, in 538 B.C. Cyrus granted the Jews, like other nations who had been deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon, to return to their lands. Cyrus further demonstrated his religious liberality by allowing the Jews to take with them the captured gold and silver utensils of Solomon's temple. He made further arrangements for the rebuilding of Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem (Bright, 1981: 360-361).

EZRA-NEHEMIAH TRADITION

The Jews kept Ezra and Nehemiah together for many years. The reason was the historical continuity that flows from Ezra through Nehemiah (Constable, 2009), and the fact that they deal with common themes - Jerusalem, its temple, its clergy, and its worship – and all of them were written during the post-exilic or Persian period (Klein, 2005: 385-401). However, it must be pointed out that the dating of the arrival of Ezra in Jerusalem has been a bone of contention among scholars, while that of Nehemiah was certain. To this end, John Bright warns that the problem is a real one, and that any attempt at reconstruction must remain to some degree tentative (Bright, 1981:379). The book of Nehemiah describes the cultus and life of Jews during post-exilic period. It reveals the rebuilding of the land, Jerusalem and its defenses and the reinstatement of the administrative and religious practices of the temple related community. It is an account of post-exilic origin and development of “a united self-conscious people, avoiding all foreign contamination and maintaining a fierce loyalty to the law of their God (*The Interpreter's Bible*, 1954: 566).”

In view of its message, Nehemiah is placed along with Daniel, Ezra and Chronicles under the third division of the Old Testament called *Hagiographa* (the writings). These books present same story of the return of the Jews from exile. The story, which began in Chronicles, is continued in Ezra and Nehemiah. Since Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah are written from the Priestly point of view, attention of the books concentrates on Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, where the temple stood. Thus, “Ezra-Nehemiah clearly indicates that Jehovah is a God who ever fulfill his promise” as guaranteed in his covenant relationship with Israel (Hendriksen, 1984: 307-310).

Moreover, Nehemiah presents a completion of the construction and administration which Ezra went earlier to Judah to fulfill; though scholars debate whether it was Ezra or Nehemiah came first to Jerusalem after exile. However, internal source affirmed that it was Ezra. In the book of Ezra, Cyrus made a decree for Jews to return to Judea under Zerubbabel and to rebuild the temple. With the completion of the temple in 516 B.C., Ezra returned to Judah with a small band of Jews. His attempt to reform the socio-religious relations and administration in Judea failed. It created a hopeless condition of living in Judea. The report on the failure of Ezra's exploit got to Nehemiah, which led to his concern

for its completion in the opening section of the book that bears his name. So, Nehemiah, the cupbearer of Artaxerxes got permission to leave Persia for Judea to rebuild Jerusalem and its walls and to become its governor. "After the walls are completed, Ezra is called in to read the law to the people, and a general reform is brought about (Francisco: 71)."

Suffice to say, in view of the foregoing that

The work begun by Ezra was continued by Nehemiah, the King's cupbearer, who in 444 obtained leave to proceed to Jerusalem with full authority to rebuild its walls and to govern the Jews (Neh. 1-7). The task was performed amid much opposition, but the wall was finished and dedicated (Neh. 12). About this time Ezra reappeared upon the scene. In connection with the Feast of Tabernacles, he read to the people 'the book of the law of Moses, which Jehovah had commanded Israel'... There is a public confession of sin. The people covenanted to keep the law (Neh. 9, 10).(Francisco: 71)

CONTEXT OF NEHEMIAH'S RECONSTRUCTION

There are four issues to consider in the reforms instituted by Nehemiah. L.W. Batten supplies the first issue. H. W. Robinson and J. L. Mays *et al* offer the third issue. J. Rogerson and P. Davies give the second issue, while W. H. Schmidt describes the fourth issue.

The first issue deals with the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem after the exiles returned to the promised land.. In Haggai 1:4, there is a record that the returned exiles built for themselves some ceiled houses and had restored the temple. However, the city was at the mercy of every marauding band from her hostile neighbours without a wall of defence. The people were insecure because a walless city makes its people an easy prey for the enemies. Even in a walled city, the first thing that the enemy has to do is to find a way of beating the security mounted by the wall so as to have easy access to the people. Nehemiah was grieved over the condition of Jerusalem and community of the remnants who returned to Jerusalem from exile. He acknowledged the faithfulness of Yahweh to the agreement He made with the nation in the consequent restoration of the exiles to the land promised to their fathers. So, the work of Nehemiah was the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem which in the record of Ezra 4:7-24, an attempt had been made to rebuild and Nehemiah knew of the expedition and was awaiting news of its supreme accomplishment but learnt of its disastrous failure (Batten, 1913: 184-187).

The second issue is the demand of the Persian policy requiring her colonies to be built around a creation of religious communities instead of political ones. So, the initiative of Nehemiah for the reconstruction of the Judean community as a colony of Persia was in accordance with Persian religious law and ancestral cult. In view of this policy, Judean territory was divided into six administrative districts of categorization in Nehemiah chapter three. This was a design to increase the population of Judea. Rogerson and Davies believe that the administrative districts serve

... as a means of consolidating around the temple and around the “leaders of the people” a “Temple Community,” and enclave within the wider province ... Nehemiah returned with further reforms ... Tobiah, the Amonites was removed from residence in the temple and those Levites who had no temple status or income were given a role and provided with a tithe (more taxes). A curfew on Sabbath trading in Jerusalem was imposed and mixed marriages banned ... His measures all had the effect of consolidating a racially and religiously exclusive Temple-City-State ... Actual ownership of land was based on the household (extended family, “fathers houses”).(Rogerson and Davies, 1989: 160-169)

The third issue is a description of the history of Judah as a community built around the civic-temple but based on the idea of exodus pattern. The objective of the book of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah is to provide “a continuous history of Judah from the beginning of the world down to the establishment of Judaism through Ezra and Nehemiah (Robinson, 1956: 65).” This was necessitated by occurrence of diversity of views among the inhabitants of Judea concerning the identity of those who represented the faithful and true Jews. It was the time when the place of several indigenous groups worshipping Yahweh in the land remained unclear. In addition, the idea of worship of Yahweh in a foreign land also threatened the very foundation of the various Jewish communities. The competing factions of the Jewish residents of Judea also found any separation of religion and politics foreign to their belief.

In such a situation, the account of Ezra-Nehemiah made use of exodus motifs in explaining how the new community of returning exiles built around the temple, later known as the civic-temple community co-habited. It was a community which could be regarded as more than a religious body, gathering for the reading of the Torah in the public. It was, according to J. L. Mays *et al* a socio-political organization made up of privileged, self-managing elite who controlled agriculture, ran the bank that was housed in the temple, collected voluntary and mandated contributions, had a workforce, and were grouped by ancestral houses headed by an elder. The priest was an administrator for the distant Persian rulers, as much as a religious figure. The returnees used the city-temple for identifying religious space and place, but also for reclaiming a political and economic place and space (Mays, et al., 1995: 211-222).

The fourth issue is the explanation of the conflicts which confronted the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem and the maintenance of its untainted administrative life. The writer of Ezra and Nehemiah narrated the return of the people from exile, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple and its wall and the establishment of the returning community in Jerusalem. The narration reveals how Nehemiah had to carry out the building of the wall amidst difficult conflicts with neighbours of the Jews in Jerusalem (Neh. 2:10,19) and the support of Shemaiah for Tobiah and Sanballat (Neh. 6:10ff). The account was written to supplement the view that only the returning exiles form the true community around the civic temple, against any misconception which included Prophetess Noadiah, other prophets and Samaritans

who intimidated the reform project as part of the community (Neh. 6:14). This idea is corroborated by Schmidt when he says that

Nehemiah, cupbearer at the Persian court in Susa, asks for, and receives in 445 B. C. (Neh.1:1; 2:1), authorization to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. The work succeeds, though the Samaritans must be excluded. Later Nehemiah becomes “governor” (5:14; cf. 8:9; 10:1) of the province of Judah, which is thus separated from Samaria and becomes independent (Schmidt, 1984: 162-167).

However, the contribution of Nehemiah to the building of defence for Jerusalem and the reform of the pattern of living in Judea have been hinged on two major factors that assisted the feat or exploit of Nehemiah. The first factor is the influence of Persian law mandating her colonies to exist as religious communities and not as political entities. Such a provision enabled Nehemiah to apply for authorization to rebuild the walls and to govern the land. The second factor is the timely inculturation of Persian law of establishment of religious communities in the utilization of the law of Moses on social management and communal administration for national reform as a civic-temple community. In other words,

... Nehemiah enjoyed the confidence and respect of the Persian King, as may be seen from the latter’s response to the several requests for assistance in the rehabilitation of Jerusalem ... His superb leadership qualities are clear from the way he organized the community for the work he came to do. ... It took tremendous courage for a layman to withstand the compromising tendencies of the high priest Eliashib (xiii 4-9) and to hold in check the commercial interests that threatened to undermine the religious obligations of the new community (xiii 15-22). (Myers, 1965: LXXVI).

A PANORAMIC VIEW OF SOME OF THE CHALLENGES TO NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA

Nigeria began as British colony with the adoption of indirect rule system of governance in the northern region and direct rule in the western and eastern regions. These British colonial approaches gave root to individualism which undermines communal living and interdependence. The individualistic sense increased ethnicity and religious discrimination or denominationalism during the pursuit of independence and nationalism, breeding a democratic system of using Nigeria as a factor for private enrichment or individual prosperity rather than corporate benefit. It manifested in different brands of political parties. In 1963 the National Democratic Party (NNDP) became the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in 1979. In 1993, it became the National Republican Party (NRC), and in 1999, it became the People Democratic Party (PDP). Action Group (AG) became Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), later transformed to Social Democratic Party (SDP). It afterwards metamorphosed to Alliance for Democracy (AD) and recently christened Action Congress (AC). Amidst proliferation of political parties which lack corporate philosophy of alleviation of poverty and development of masses and

villages, the military aberration in politics and governance struck, based on invitation and sponsorship from business men. The twenty-nine years of military rule (1966-1979 and 1983-1999) out of forty-nine years of existence of Nigeria as an independent state (1960-2009) entrenched authoritarian rule, structure of social injustice and increasing rate of poverty (Kukah, 2008).

Urbanization with city industries and city housing estates meant to develop the nation has been hijacked by few rich classes. It has turned mass number of landlords in villages to poor masses, destitute and tenants in and around high cost of city housing estates. Youths in the villages and towns have been seduced by urban life and infrastructural facilities to villages and communities of empty and lock-up buildings. Salaries earned by the poor youth from city industries went back to the few rich people in the form of house rent in city housing estates. This has created identity problem and alienation from cultural elements of the nativity of the youths. It turns them to use their skill and youthful age reared from the sponsorship from poor families in the villages to serve the affluent class at meagre wage in the city and below the earning rate of their colleague in the affluent group. So the youth sent to the schools through the sponsorship of the villages and towns are pressured into developing the cities that did not contribute meaningfully to their academic pursuit and technological training (Julio, 1981: 28). This oppression continues as children of affluent politicians of 1963 and 1979 republics are reinitiated by their parents into a political structure which treats Nigeria as a factory of economic acquisition for few rich through political manipulation of electoral proceedings in 1999 to date (Saraki, 2003:30). So, professionals, researchers and technocrats from Nigerian Universities become ineligible to be sponsored into National Assembly, the Senate and State house of representatives. They are not nominated for national projects in their area of discipline or professionalism. It is processed by unjust distribution of lands and inaccessibility to resources and instruments of survival by the rapacious assaults of the powerful over the poor (Roy, 1991: xi).

Power to enforce a respect of human rights and supply of necessities of life entrusted to the law enforcement agents and the Police Force is twisted to oppress and marginalize the citizens who were to be defended. There are allegations of extortion, fraud, forgery, abuse of public trust, conspiracy and gross abuse and misuse of national office leveled against the Police Force Criminal Investigation Department and Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad. They are reported to be involved in false accusation of citizens and incarceration of innocents (Akinyele, 2009: 31-32).

There is also unemployment of intelligent graduates. Some of them resort to armed robbery because they are not empowered. They turned the intelligence, creativity and skill acquired from education as resources for social ills. It is seen as redistribution of wealth and making of endowment fund by robbery (Raji, 2008: 25). Coupled to the above is the fact that the erratic supply of power has stymied opportunity to create more employment. Manufacturers association of Nigeria (MAN) consisting of one thousand and five hundred members requested for 864 megawatts of electricity to increase its productions and job creation in July 2007. Though Yar'adua regime inherited 3,000 megawatts from Obasanjo administration, the electric power output has currently reduced below 1,000 megawatts. Two tyre manufacturing companies (Michelin and Dunlop) had folded up because of the challenge in the area of electric power supply in the country. Since the cost of providing electric power has become the greatest impediment to effective production, cutting-edge competitiveness and qualitative profitability. Nigerians now depend on "... their petrol or diesel-fired generators as the

main source of power, creating another environmental hazards, while the national grid is treated as a back-up (Bamidele, 2009: 40).”

Analysis of stock exchange for 2008 shows a threatening decline in percentage of value. As of January 2008, All Share Index (ASI) had 58,593.43 points with Market Capitalization (MC) at ₦10.6 trillion. By the close of the market year, All Share Index declined as low as 28,500 points while Market Capitalization was ₦ 6.1 trillion. The result reveals about 50 percent stock value decline due to falling crude oil prices (Oriloye, 2009: 30-32).

Many companies are down-sizing due to cash crunch which has been linked with falling crude oil price in the international market and the restiveness of militant youths in the Niger Delta. There was a shut-in in the oil exploration and production as Chevron shut down her 90,000 barrel per day Escravos export terminal due to attacks from the militants on its major crude oil supply pipeline. The 2009 budget was planned in 2008 on the assumption that New York Oil Mercantile exchange would not fall below \$45 per barrel. The United States experienced a decline on consumption and price of oil from \$147.27 per barrel to \$38.20 in New York as Brent crude oil settled for \$39.15 a barrel in London. The proposed budget has recorded a fiscal deficit of ₦ 1.09 trillion. This happens when 95 percent foreign exchange earnings of Nigeria and sustenance of national economy are based on crude oil product, which the nation has no control over its price (Oluokun, 2009: 20-22).

On education for All (EFA) by year 2015, the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) listed countries like Finland, Norway, United Kingdom, Italy, Slovenia, Argentina, Tanzania, Mexico, Brunei, etc. among those who have achieved the standard point. Nigeria is named along with Liberia, Sierra Leone, etc. as lagging behind. Though Finland did not have crude oil, the Finnish exalt education (science and technology, electronics and telecommunications) by providing structures for increasing pupil enrolment in classrooms. Teaching is revered as top list of favorite professions. Olusegun Obasanjo’s administration launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) with ₦ 85 billion take off grant on 30th September 1999. It targeted making 40 million Nigerians literate by 2007, trained 30,000 teachers and building 28,000 classrooms nationwide. Rather than upgrading science and technology in the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions of the nation, there is a turnout of none pragmatic and outdated syllabus, dilapidated classrooms, and frustrated teachers who now concentrate more on publishing articles than on classroom teaching amidst overpopulated students attendance (Adekeye, 2008: 120-121).

Due to unemployment, retrenchment and derivative system of casual labor or report or part-time jobs which require qualitative service within short time but remunerated based on quantity of hours spent rather than quality of service and skill invested, many Nigerians now turn begging as way of earning a living. Insufficient fund from casual jobs force them to live and sleep under flyover bridges, which exposed them to smoke from marijuana and rape. Destitution or homelessness becomes a practice for those whose houses and lands were confiscated and demolished by governing authority in exchange for building highbrow city housing estates for the few rich. The same applies to those victims of forced evictions. Young women in their thirties with their toddlers are common sight turning eatery buildings, fast food joints and restaurants and their frontage to sleeping homes at night. Some do not have access to portable water, opportunity to train children in school and electricity supply for house chores and small-scale self-employed jobs. Others are pensioners without entitlements from the

pensions Board. Towns with a campus of a tertiary institution and proliferation of banks experience high-rise in rent payment. Inter-tribal and religious riots have ended with mass demolition of houses and slaughtering of their human inhabitants (Majirioghene, 2009: 19-23).

Sequel to a lifestyle of destitution, alms begging, and petty trading which could not pay for food, clothing, and shelter, these Nigerians make do with theft, touting, pimping, sex-trafficking and prostitution with child labor in the sale of satchet water and akara balls or roasted plaintain, to survive. Engagement in half-a-day, till-day-breaks or overnight and hourly or short term sex workings in any popular hotel is very common. Professional prostitution in form of home service delivery by town or campus sweepers and photocopy machine operators in various corners is rampant. There is also the pronounced brothel service. This is sexual slavery of young women and girls whose virginity is on sale to highest bidders. Burst breasts and buttocks are issues of consideration in choice of young ladies patronized by men who may be as old as their fathers but refused to use condoms in the age of HIV/AIDS. The operators "... sell young girls at higher prices. For children, brothel owners can demand up to twice the usual fee from clients who prefer virgins, who are presumed to be disease-free (Silverman, 2007:17-19)."

LEADERSHIP TRAITS REQUIRED FOR NATION BUILDING: LESSONS FROM NEHEMIAH

Nation building is not something that happens by accident; rather, it is a result of concerted efforts of the people. But as all people cannot steer the wheel of the political vehicle, the onus of nation building falls on the selected political leaders whom the people trust. Defining nation building, Gambari opines thus,

nations just don't happen by accident, rather they are built by men and women with vision and resolve. Nation-building is therefore the product of conscious statecraft, not happenstance. Nation-building is always a work in-progress; a dynamic process in constant need of nurturing and re-invention. Nation-building never stops and true nation-builders never rest because all nations are constantly facing up to new challenges (Gambari, 2008).

Gambari also identified five major areas that pose a great challenge to true nation building in Nigeria. These include the challenge of (i) our history, (ii) socio-economic inequalities, (iii) appropriate constitutional settlement, (iv) building institutions for democracy and development, and (v) leadership (Gambari, 2008). From the definition and areas of challenge in nation-building above, it could be seen that leadership is a critical factor. For a leader to be able to face successfully some of the challenges of nation building and turn around things positively, there are some leadership qualities that must be found in him. Nehemiah possessed some of these qualities and that was what made him to succeed in the task of building the broken wall of his father's country. Some of these leadership traits will be discussed here with the aim of calling Nigerian leaders to imbibe some of these qualities in their bid to develop this country. These leadership qualities must be understood in two important but related ways. First, there are personal qualities of integrity, honesty, commitment, and competence of

individual leaders at the top. Second, there are the collective qualities of common vision, for us, and desire for development of the elites as a whole.

The first leadership quality that is found in Nehemiah is patriotism. One of the signs of patriotism is having serious and deep concern about the bad state of one's country, with the will power to bring about positive change. 'Pride' is another term that Aniagolu Okoye has called patriotism. While he is aware of the fact that the church people see pride as a bad and negative thing, because the Bible affirms that it goes before a fall, he believes that the pride that leads to self-assurance and confidence is extremely necessary for individual development and the country's progress. Okoye goes ahead to argue that Nigeria's steady socio-economic and political decline is mostly caused by the absence of pride on the part of the governed and the leaders (Aniagolu-Okoye, 2009). This patriotism or pride was what Nehemiah displayed on hearing that the wall of Jerusalem was broken. The bad news touched him to the bones that he could not hold his emotional attachment to his fatherland by weeping and refusing to eat. It is the concern or emotional attachment that one has for his country that will propel the person to embark on productive thinking that can bring solution to the awry state of affairs in his or her country.

Many of the political leaders in Nigeria lack this quality. They never believe in this country. This is demonstrated in the fact that most of their things are imported, their children and wards are sent abroad for schooling while allowing the educational sector in their country to suffer. There have been records of incessant strike actions by the university teachers and other unions in the educational sector. This is informed by the lack of concern and self-centredness on the part of some of the leaders who have established their private universities and are making conscious efforts to destroy the public universities, thereby making it impossible for the children of the down-trodden to have access to higher education, which in turn will widen the class and socio-structure of the citizenry. A patriotic leader would have allowed his children and family to pass through what ordinary people have gone through. This will really push him to find solution to some of the myriads of challenges to development.

Another quality that a leader must have is the ability to count the cost of the enormous task before him or her and having a blueprint of how to achieve the set objectives or goals. It will be discovered that immediately Nehemiah was given a mandate by king Artaxerxes, who can be regarded as the colonial master of the Jewish nation then, before he took any step of execution of the project, he firstly went to Jerusalem and surveyed the extent of the damage of the wall. Most of the leaders in Nigeria lack this quality. They don't have proper knowledge of the country's problems. Neither do they solve the country's problems on paper before they are given the mandate to rule. This is why many lose focus as soon as they get to power. This leadership challenge has been a recurrent trend in the pursuit of nation building in Nigeria and except conscious effort is made by the political leaders, who are interested in making the nation Nigeria great, in determining the what and the how of solving various challenges facing Nigerians, the task of nation-building may be a mirage in Nigeria socio-polity.

Because Nehemiah knew that he could not do anything successful on his own, he therefore carried the people along (Neh. 2:17-18). Having examined the broken wall, as a way of allowing the people to put the problem in proper perspective, he reminded the people of the reproach and the insecurity they had experienced. He knew quite well that if he has good intentions, innovations, and

ideas, he could not translate them into reality all alone. He needed the support of the people. This warranted him to solicit the support of the people to which the people responded positively. The people joined him in the building of the wall and they worked tirelessly. A quagmire to which many political leaders in Nigeria have deeply sunk is lack of accountability and trust in the people. Once they have been sworn into political office, they neglect the electorates and treated them with disdain. They formulate policies that are peoples' 'censured' instead of peoples' 'centred.' Opinion polls are disregarded and the decisions of the selected individuals are upheld. It is this understanding that the current Minister of Information and Communication has in her campaign for Re-branding Nigeria whereby she has been inviting people in different sectors and explaining the contents of the Re-branding exercise to them so that the people may have ownership of the project. This step of the Minister is a right step in a right direction in carrying the people along for support of the project. Other political leaders must learn from this.

A good leader must be courageous and have resilience to withstand any opposition. It must be known that no true nation building is going to be easy. This is why a leader must have a foresight of the opposition that will arise and summon courage to weather the storm. As Nehemiah and his people were building the wall, there arose opposition from Sanballat and Tobiah, who were making mockery of the work. Instead of Nehemiah to retreat from the project, he devised means through which half of the people would be working on the project and half would be guarding the people with weapons of war to crush the enemies anytime they appear. This courage is what Nigerian leaders have not been able to develop. As a matter of fact, there are enemies of nation building in this country. These are the selected few who do not want things to work normally so that they will continue to monopolize the market force. For instance, those importing generating set will not desire government efforts of generating and distributing electricity power to succeed, those who have trailers would not want the project of resuscitating the railway transportation to work out, and many others. These are forces of anti-nation-building. Majority of our leaders know these forces, but they could not muster enough strength and courage to deal with them once and for all. In most cases the reason is obvious. These anti-nation-building forces have manipulated them into offices and to deal with them is to be playing with their mandate. Unless this pus of money-politics and god-fatherism in Nigerian politics is dealt with and discouraged, Nigerian political leaders will only be paying cosmetic lips to issue of true and genuine nation building.

Nehemiah, as a political leader of his people, made judicious use of various resources in his domain. He utilized the taxes collected for common good and made sure that the oppressed get fair hearing and justice. When the oppressed brought their complaints to Nehemiah, he was very angry at the way the wealthy class was maltreating the ordinary citizenry and rebuked the rich and the rulers (5:1-9). Nehemiah was a transparent leader who understood the value of accountability and selfless service to the people. For the twelve years in office, Nehemiah and those in his cabinet did not eat the 'bread of Governor.' He refused to take undue advantage of his leadership position to enrich himself, which the Governors before him were notorious for. He attributed his selfless service to the fear of God in him (5:14-19). One of the great challenges facing nation building in Nigeria is lack of selfless service on the part of many of the leaders. Majority sees leadership position as an opportunity to secure their financial freedom and that is why politics has become an issue of do-or-die affair in Nigeria. These leaders care less about the welfare of the people. The trust reposed in them by the

public, if at all the people legitimately choose them in the first place, has been mismanaged. There is the need for attitudinal change on the part of our leaders if they actually desired true national development.

To come to the followership, as patriotism is expected of the leaders, it is also expected of the followers. The fact that leaders are not doing the right thing does not give the followers the audacity to engage in negative behaviours, which further tainted and dented the image of the country. Patriotism requires doing right even in the face of opposition. Patriotism is always on the side of the truth and justice. Nigerian citizens need to get this right in all they do. When the government awards contracts for road construction, generation and distribution of power supply, production of portable and consumable waters, ecological and environmental preservation, etc., who are the people that will translate all these and many others into reality? They are the ordinary citizens. The questions then are: why is it that many of these projects never saw the light of day? Why are many projects abandoned? Why are many projects executed with sub-standard materials? The answer to all these questions boils down to lack of patriotism on the part of the contractors, many of whom are citizens of Nigeria. The truth is if they are passionately committed to true development in their country, there wouldn't have been siphoning of the money meant for building public infrastructure into their personal or family accounts and still be parading themselves as true compatriots of this nation. Therefore, there must be attitudinal change in this regard if true nation building is to be achieved.

Another important aspect to true nation building that must be explored is the issue of Nigerians in Diasporas. This group of people has a lot to contribute to national development. We need to remember that Nehemiah was a Diasporian Jew. However, he had risen to a significant position in Persian Empire – the post of a cupbearer of a king. Extra biblical references that mentioned the office of a cupbearer in the Persian court have revealed that this was a position second only in authority to the king (Neh. 1:11b). Nehemiah was not only the chief treasurer and keeper of the King's signet ring, but he also tasted the King's food to make sure no one had poisoned it. Constable, quoting Edwin Yamauch, notes:

From varied sources it may be assumed that Nehemiah as a royal cupbearer would probably have had the following traits: (1) He would have been well trained in court etiquette (cf. Dan. 1:4-5). (2) He was probably a handsome individual (cf. Dan. 1:4, 13, 15). (3) He would certainly know how to select the wines to set before the King (4) He would have to be a convivial companion to the King with a willingness to lend an ear at all times.... (5) He would be a man of great influence as one with the closest access to the King. (6) Above all, Nehemiah had to be an individual who enjoyed the unreserved confidence of the King (Constable, 2009).

Nehemiah used this exalted position in a foreign land to bring about developmental changes in his home country. It is a known fact that Nigeria is endowed with human resources. Many of the Nigerians in the Diaspora are doing well in their business and life endeavours, and some are even occupying strategic and important position which could be exploited to assist their fatherland. The Nigerian in the Diaspora should, therefore, emulate Nehemiah and use their wealth of experience and exposure to advise the government on what should be done to arrest many of the ugly situations being

faced at home. They must not put up “I don’t care” attitude toward the happenings in their country, for no matter how much comfort they may be enjoying, even if they acquire the citizenship of the country of their sojourn through naturalization, they will still be traced back to their root in Nigeria. Therefore, they need to actively participate in the developmental process of this country by participating in the electoral process (this is being looked into by the House Committee on Nigerian in the Diaspora), by coming up with programmes that will help alleviate the poverty level in the country, by intervening in the medical sector through bringing of medical personnel to perform certain operation freely for people, and many other laudable programmes.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the reform which Nehemiah initiated and executed among the returned exiles in Israel. The reform was successful as a result of certain leadership traits found in Nehemiah such as patriotism, transparency, accountability, and mutual trust in the people. It is even on record that as a result of the will power of Nehemiah, the rebuilding of the wall that should have taken about two years before completion was completed within fifty-two days (Bright, 1981:381). These qualities are seen as germane to any nation building in any culture or country. Nigeria is seen as a nation undergoing the process of nation building. However, the rate at which the developmental race is going is very slow. This is the result of the lack of focus, patriotism, transparency, accountability, and sincerity on the part of our leaders. To worsen the situation, the followers also see these unpatriotic, insincerity and corruption on the part of the leaders as an escape measure for them to sink into the abyss of moral decadence. They too have been infected with social vices that everyone is doing what he/she likes similar to the situation of the Israelites when they had no king over them. Many are no longer thinking straight and all these became a clog in the wheel of progress in the country.

This paper, therefore, submitted that both the leader and citizens of Nigeria have a lot to learn from the story of Nehemiah, how he carried the people along and how the people also gave him full support. It was based on this principle that they were able to record success even in the face of stiff opposition. For the vision of nation building to be achieved in Nigeria, all hands must be on deck. Everyone must be ready to perform his or her role. However, the political leaders must know that they have larger responsibility to chart the course for nation building in Nigeria and must be ready to take the bull by the horn. Pat Utomi, the Africa Democratic Congress (ADC) party presidential candidate in the 2007 elections, understood the key role that political leaders need to play in nation building and therefore called on them to have all-politicians conference to address the crisis of nation building confronting the country. In his words “for this prospect (nation building) to be achieved, there is the need for Nigeria’s leadership elite to have sober, fair-minded, and nation building focused reflections in view of the desperate need to ensure the ascendancy of progress sustaining values (<http://www.businessdayonline.com/index.php?option=comcontent&view=article&id=461:mark-buhari-utomi-others-point-way-forward-for-nigeria>, 2009).” There must be attitudinal change on the part of every one, which has been the onerous message of the rebranding Nigeria project. Everyone must shun corruption, for as Dora Akunyili said “we can’t grow in an atmosphere of corruption, we must be proud of our country and be ready to make necessary sacrifice to see it developed so that posterity will be proud of us (Akunyili, 2009: 20-27).”

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