

Research Article

## Doing Theology in a Knowledge Society Today (A Nigerian Christian Public Theological Reflection)

By

Dr. Olo Ndukwe

Hugh Goldie Lay/Theological Training Institution, Arochukwu, Abia State, Nigeria  
Associate Research Fellow, Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology,  
Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, Rep. of South Africa

Email: [olondukwe@yahoo.com](mailto:olondukwe@yahoo.com)  
Phone Number: +2348037114050

Accepted April 14, 2017

**Abstract:** This article seeks to show that doing Christian theology in a knowledge society as Nigeria of today demands a radical approach/focus. It draws from a phenomenological public theological approach to argue that such radical approach/focus demands that Christian witness in this post-Cold War Nigeria must therefore recognize and respect the fact that the 'Clash of civilizations' which arises from people's living consciousness of their cultural and religious identities is a primary source of conflict in the country. The article identifies public theology, which establishes a public church that seeks to raise and install royal priests, who seek a reforming church, a reforming society and a reforming economy in Nigeria as the implications of doing Christian theology in a knowledge society today. It therefore concludes with community development as the penultimate goal of the radical approach/focus.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Society, Clash of Civilizations, Royal Priests, Reforming Economy, Community Development, Public Church,

### Introduction

Towards the dusk of the last millennium which ushered in the dawn of the current millennium, Samuel P. Huntington in his famous classic articulated his hypothesis around the claim that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. His perspective underscored that in this post-Cold War world, people will define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs and institutions.

Without sentiments, one can quickly summarize this perspective as a serious puzzle and ask why. If this position is accepted, Huntington's six points explanations on why civilizations will clash can provide us with more substantive responses to such puzzle and its accompanying question. From his perspective:

1. Differences among civilizations are too basic in that civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition, and, most important, religion. These fundamental differences are

the product of centuries, so they will not soon disappear

2. The world is becoming a smaller place. As a result, interactions across the world are increasing, which intensify "civilization consciousness" and the awareness of differences between civilizations and commonalities within civilizations.
3. Due to economic modernization and social change, people are separated from longstanding local identities. Instead, religion has replaced this gap, which provides a basis for identity and commitment that transcends national boundaries and unites civilizations.
4. The growth of civilization-consciousness is enhanced by the dual role of the West. On the one hand, the West is at a peak of power. At the same time, a return-to-the-roots phenomenon is occurring among non-Western civilizations. A West at the peak of its power confronts non-Western countries that increasingly have the desire, the will and the resources to shape the world in non-Western ways.
5. Cultural characteristics and differences are less mutable and hence less easily compromised and resolved than political and economic ones.
6. Economic regionalism is increasing. Successful economic regionalism will reinforce civilization-consciousness. Economic regionalism may succeed only when it is rooted in a common civilization

Huntington's perspective on the Clash of civilizations (COC) thrives on the hypothesis which stressed that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. For him, the COC represents a development of history. In the past, world history was mainly about the struggles between monarchs, nations and ideologies, such as seen

within Western civilization. But after the end of the Cold War, world politics moved into a new phase, in which non-Western civilizations are no longer the exploited recipients of Western civilization but have become additional important actors joining the West to shape and move world history.<sup>2</sup> This COC which arises from peoples' living consciousness of their cultural and especially, religious identity, constitutes a primary source of conflicts in Nigeria today.

Silvanus I. Udoidem for instance, has observed that one of the greatest problems confronting the country today, apart from political malaise and economic depression, is the growing rise of the incidents of confrontational religious crises in the form of riots. Locating the bulk of these crises to the doorstep of the two dominant religions (Christianity and Islam), he said, 'these two religions are saddled across the Nigerian polity, each no longer knocking and pleading to be admitted but seeking to take over the architectural design and construction of the Nigerian polity.' And for him, 'it is this struggle for control that is the root cause of the conflicts and crises in the nation's political and religious life.'<sup>3</sup>

Ogbu U Kalu tends to corroborate this view when he said, 'When a Muslim military leader surreptitiously registered Nigeria as a member of the Islamic Organization Countries in 1986, the uproar mobilized by the Christian Association of Nigeria forced its withdrawal. This incidence has inspired Muslim violence...The radical conjecture of radical impulses in time (1970-1980), space, (northern Nigeria), and context (among the youths) within Islam and Christianity has turned religious politics in Nigeria into shark-infested waters.'<sup>4</sup> These observations make it incontrovertible that rooted in the COC, peoples' living consciousness of their cultural and especially, religious identity constitutes a primary source of conflicts in Nigeria today.

Above all, evidences around makes it clear that whether we believe it or not, the concept, vision and goals of the knowledge society have captured Nigerians. In addition, the current struggle of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) to quell the up-risings of the Boko Haram Islamic sect, the Shitte Islamic Sects, the Niger Delta Militancy as well as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) among others, all attest to this claim of the effects of the COC on knowledge Nigerian societies today.

### Knowledge Society

The igi-global.com among other things, defines a knowledge society as a new one (society) formed as a result of the contemporary societal change pushed by technological innovation and institutional transformation. It is not only about technological innovations, but also about human beings, their personal growth and their individual creativity, experience and participation in the generation of knowledge. Here the primary role of

societies is to ensure that their knowledge sources are passed on and advanced by each generation.<sup>5</sup>

The pragfoundation.net presents a knowledge society as one that is concerned with the quest for a more sustainable economic and social development that benefits all. It builds on the pervasive influence of modern information and communication technologies to increasingly bring about a fundamental reshaping of the global economy. Therein, knowledge about how to excel competitively and information about who excels are both more readily available, while the effective creation, use and dissemination of knowledge is increasingly the key to success. A knowledge society seeks for a more sustainable economic and social development that benefits all. Here innovation, which fuels new job creation and economic growth, is quickly becoming the key factor in global competitiveness. Innovation fundamentally means coming up with new ideas about how to do things better or faster. It is about making a product or offering a service that no one had thought of before. In its perspective, innovation is about putting new ideas to work in enterprise and having a skilled work force that can use those new ideas.

Sally Burch while struggling with the question of whether we live in 'an era of change' or in a 'changing era' says that the notion of knowledge society ("sociedad del conocimiento") emerged toward the end of the 90s and is particularly used as an alternative by some in academic circles to the information society. Echoing Abdul Waheed Khan of UNESCO, she observed, "*Information society is the building block for knowledge societies...the concept of 'knowledge societies' includes a dimension of social, cultural, economical, political and institutional transformation, and a more pluralistic and developmental perspective. In my view, the concept of 'knowledge societies' is preferable to that of the 'information society' because it better captures the complexity and dynamism of the changes taking place...the knowledge in question is important not only for economic growth but also for empowering and developing all sectors of society.*"

This author pitches his tenth with Burch. In her perspective, the concept "information society" represents a political and ideological construct that has developed under the direction of neo-liberal globalization, whose main goal has been to accelerate the establishment of an open and "self-regulated" world market. This policy has counted on the close collaboration of multilateral organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, in order for the weak countries to abandon national regulations or protectionist measures that "would discourage" the inversion; all with the known result of a scandalous widening of the gaps between the rich and the poor in the World.

In other words, a knowledge society is a child of the contemporary societal change, which is pushed/sustained by technological innovation and institutional transformation that respects human dignity, personal growth and individual creativity, experience and

participation in the generation of knowledge. Here innovation as earlier said, metamorphoses into the key factor in competitiveness. A knowledge society is committed to discovering and promoting the means of coming up with new ideas about how to do things better or faster. In its perspective, innovation is about putting new ideas to work in enterprises and having a skilled work force that can use those new ideas. Unlike the information society, a knowledge society as Burch has shown better captures the complexity and dynamism of the changes taking place. In a knowledge society, acquisition of knowledge is for economic growth and for empowerment /development of all sectors of the community.

### Doing Theology within a Knowledge Society

Given the fore going particularly as they have to do with the effects of the COC on knowledge Nigerian societies, this section prepares the ground for the subsequent section to struggle and come up with meaningful response(s) to the big question and that is, (whether one belongs the camp of those who hold that our country is 'an emergent knowledge society' or those who hold that she is 'an emerging' knowledge society) what would doing theology mean/imply in Nigeria? The COC has sustained its continuing transformation of people's cultural and religious identities into one of the primary sources of conflict in (post-Cold War/Colonial) Nigeria today. Theology must state and continuously restate its modus operandi if its witnesses and their resultant church (es) are to make themselves meaningful to the inhabitants of these knowledge societies.

From a missional methodological point of view, Hans Jurgens Hendriks has observed that doing theology today demands being prayerfully reflective and systematically involved in God's ongoing mission under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This definition holds that theology is not a noun but a verb because it is about God, about the faith community; about a specific time and place; about Scripture and tradition; about discernment; about the Kingdom and about transformation. In his perspective, doing theology is *inter alia*; a personal and congregational way of living, a methodology that leads to transformation, a faith praxis. From his perspective, doing theology is especially relevant in times of transition, when people must cross boundaries and face new problems and predicaments. In such circumstances, guidelines for commonsense are: work experimentally, create learning points, evaluate failure and learn from it: it is a gradual process. Hendrik's definition presents great rays of hope for the radical approach/focus to engaging the Nigerian experience of the clash of civilization in transformational developmental dialogues.

In this challenging experience of the COC, peoples' cultural and religious identities have become constitutive of the primary sources of conflicts which have turned the Nigerian economic, political, academic, etc polities, policies and politics into turbulent rivers which most God seekers find very difficult to swim against their ferocious

tides. Given the content, ethics and results of their teachings, public utterances, etc in the public domain, it becomes very doubtful for one to agree that the religious traditions which bred and breeds many leaders and followers of the nation embody a living consciousness of the fact that Nigeria is a knowledge society: a child of the contemporary societal change in which sustained technological innovation and institutional transformation demands concrete respect of human dignity, personal growth and individual creativity, experience and participation in the generation of knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge as lived, living and livable historical realities today.

### Meanings/Implications of Doing Theology in Nigeria Today

The issues raised in the previous section of this paper make Hendriks' perspective critical in the quest for a more nuanced approach/focus on doing theology in a knowledge society as Nigeria. Its radical approach/focus will *inter alia*, proclaim and insist on a substantive realization of the SDGs<sup>7</sup> as a theological witness, which permits persons of all faiths to participate meaningfully in improving the GNP<sup>8</sup>, GDP<sup>9</sup> or capita per income of their societies: it is about doing public theology.

Public Theology: Gleaning from Jurgens Moltmann, William Storrar & Andrew R Morton have described public theology as one that has to do with the public relevance of a theology which has as at the core of its Christian identity a concern for the coming of God's kingdom in the public world of human history.<sup>11</sup> From a Christian humanist perspective, John de Gruchy describes it as a Christian witness 'that is not simply about the Church making public statements or engaging in social actions; it is rather a mode of doing theology that is intended to address matters of public importance.'<sup>12</sup> Public theology connotes the public implication of the calling and being of the *laos tou Theou* (God's people) within a concrete larger society, as a renewed kind of language in the Church's critical engagement with the challenges of the larger society and Church traditions including the issues that have to do with persons of other faiths. It can therefore assist the Church to prayerfully reflect on most of its colonial missionary rooted (triumphal) ecclesiastical traditions, doctrines and policies which scarcely care about the feelings and dispositions of non-Christian believers or adherents in their visions for missionary engagements, with a view to systematically engage in God's ongoing mission in Nigeria as a seeker of the shalom of society. In this sense, public theology speaks about a radical approach/focus in doing theology, which is fundamentally, is also intended to actively participate in addressing issues of public importance.

More concretely, this radical approach/focus in doing theology will assist the Church to be substantively committed to for instance, realize the SDGs as her theological witness which also permits persons of all faiths to participate meaningfully in corporate growth and improvement of the GNP, GDP or capita per income of

their societies. The UN has underscored that for the goals to be reached, everyone: member governments, the private sector, civil society and all people need to do their parts. This UN position makes the above perspectives on public theology a critical approach/focus to doing theology. The perspective will thus demand from, and inspire the Church to acknowledge and body the fact that public theological witness can also be described as a transformational developmental Christian witness whose goal is shalom of society: it also adopts varied approaches to rediscover, recover and celebrate the human dignity of persons especially, the differently others.

In other words, this radical vision/focus for public theology can also challenge its Nigerian practitioners to also show a preferential love to the victims and sustainers of the distressing legacies of political and ideological construct that has developed under the direction of neo-liberal globalization. These distressing legacies do not permit all persons to participate meaningfully in improving the GNP, GDP or capita per income of their societies. They often reflect, demonize and banish others especially people of other faiths to the margins of public affairs. Their main goal has been to rather widen the gaps between 'the haves' and 'the have nots,' as a welcomed spirituality. Furthermore, rooted in pseudo-political economic vision, they often reduce Nigerians to unhealthy consumers in consumerist consumer-oriented knowledge societies.

Significantly and paradoxically, the quest for this radical approach/focus for public theology, which this paper calls for, is for a God-fearing knowledge society where the needed knowledge is both for economic growth and for empowering /developing all sectors of society, as a true Christian public (theological) witness. In its perspective, the Lord has also identified himself with such victims of the distressing legacies of the political and ideological constructs of neo-liberal globalization. neo-liberal globalization in special ways (cf. Mt 25:40). From a Christian perspective, public theological witness also seeks to re-present its visionary engagements as that, which is under mandate to serve as a witness of the *voluntasrevelata Dei* (revealed will of God) and as an embodied approach to *fides quaerensintellectum* (faith seeking understanding). Public theology envisions and works to establish and sustain a public church in a given environment.

**Public Church:** From our discussion above, it is evident that public theology stresses the public implication of the calling and being of the Church within a concrete larger society. This (Public) theology produces a public church, which speaks about a Christian witness that is not simply about the Church making public statements or engaging in social actions. Being a public church rather speaks about a mode of embodying theology that is also intended to address matters of public importance. Thus a public church (community of faith) is one whose visionary enterprises engages public life and issues in transformational developmental dialogues for the common good of the society. As a result, doing theology in

a public church is about a community of faith doing public theology without losing sight of her historical identity and visionary practices in the process. Public church does not deny the public opportunity to make a meaningful impact on the people of God.

As Stackhouse<sup>15</sup> has said, public theology also insists that theology, in dialogue with other fields of thought carries indispensable resources for forming, ethically reordering and morally guiding human conduct in various spheres of life. Its resultant community of faith is a public one which is under mandate for her approach to doing theology to serve as a witness of the *voluntasrevelata Dei* and as an embodied approach to *fides quaerensintellectum*. This can thus bequeath the Church with the needed radical approach/focus for doing theology in a way that proclaims the *voluntasrevelata Dei* as a feasible and plausible historical reality which the faith community can accomplish as *fidesquaerensintellectum*.

As Stackhouse argued elsewhere, the community of faith seeking to know and embody the right and the good is one which demands the freedom to preach and teach openly about justice in all areas of life. She does this not as one that has already achieved enough but as one that seeks how to understand and do what she already knows and does better. This community does so without coercion and dependence on the state, nor seeking to control the state. It is also concerned about various organizations and means of communication that spring up around those religious organizations which seek what is right and good for the smallest units in society,<sup>16</sup> especially the family, the school, and the work place. These issues in his perspective are constitutive of the building blocks of society. Evidently, this will help a lot to transform and proclaim Nigeria as a knowledge society where the Church's radical approach/focus in doing theology will play critical roles in taming the ferocious tides of the COC which transforms people's cultural and religious identities into one of the primary sources of conflict.

Public Church in this radical sense/focus is very much concerned with Christian social ethics which seeks to realize what some scholars have described as Jesus' manifesto within history: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (cf. Lk 4: 18-19). Given these insights, it becomes clearer that talking about public church from a Christian perspective speaks about an assemble of the laos of God whose visionary enterprises engages public life and issues without losing sight of our historical identity and visionary practices. Such lives and theological witnesses do not deny the public opportunity to make a meaningful impact on the Church.

In other words, a public Church is one which embraces it as substantive success when her theological engagements also reach out into the public world where sovereignty and other manifestations of idolatry threaten. Her faith

offers positive accounts of the good life, of the place of human beings in the created world, of right relations between rich and poor, neighbours and strangers, human beings and other members of creation. Here the Christian faith and its theological vision/enterprises seeks to substantiate to all and sundry that, as Leith has said, the Christian faith does more justice to the facts, makes more sense out of life, illuminates life, opens life more to the grace of God that forgives and heals wounded consciences and bruised spirits than does any other faith.<sup>17</sup> Doing theology in a public church is also committed to raising, installing and sustaining royal priests within a given social order.

**Royal Priests:** This speaks about people who seek to serve God and at the same time draw from the Kingdom ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ to rule their little worlds of daily endeavours for the Lord and to the Master's glory. These unique people of God also work for the restoration of shalom to societies. Thus their radical approach/focus on doing theology cannot permit their believers/adherents to pay lip service towards the realization of the SDGs as a theological witness which permits people of all faiths to play active roles in growing and improving the GDP, GNP and per capita income of their societies. Royal priests also embody a unique vision for Christian pedagogy (education). That is, one which also teaches that the Church is about God's people who gather to do business in His name as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, who are called and mandated to declare the praise of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (cf. 1 Pet 2: 9). Their central concern is to find out what it means here and now to put into practice that unique quality of life which represents God's promise to them and their promise to the God and service to humanity.

To achieve this, royal priests embody and expect all believers in Jesus Christ to also embody their faith-based convictions in visible ways that can express the purposive activities of God in history. Their visionary approach/focus to doing Christian theology as martyrs (witness); the impact of such persons within human experience, i.e., their own testimony as martyria or martyrion; and the underlying process of living out the witness as martyrein or diamartyresthai, i.e., bearing witness saddles the resultant subordinate Church with the responsibility to embody Christian life as political witness of faithful believers. This will go a long way to assist in reducing the especially, religious violence which as this paper has shown is a product of COC in Nigeria.

For the royal priests, the subordinate believer appeal to moral osmosis<sup>19</sup> as a crucial theological ethical approach for an embodied witness of Jesus Christ among the nations. Royal priests stress the integrity of moral decision and historical actions as a political theological witness of believers in Jesus Christ. They reflect on the Christian life as one of service to God, to humanity and to the entire creation. The uniqueness of their faith 'is not that it insists that everyone is a theologian but that everyone should be a responsible theologian who can speak intelligently about

the faith.' This uniqueness stresses that in this vision of embodying Christian discipleship, believers' witness must be congruent with their Christocentric daily lifestyles, as a political responsibility for reforming the ministry of the church. It seeks to impact a significant moral influence on non-believers in Jesus Christ. Thus, its quest for representing Christian discipleship as a political responsibility of believers provides us with an impetus to envision and cooperate with the Lord to initiate, establish and grow a new Church that engages in continuing reformation of her vision and traditions in order to meet up with the challenges of a knowledge society in Nigeria. Royal priests envision and work towards a reforming church.

**Reforming Church:** The reforming church speaks about the *laos tou Theou* whose ministry is committed to a continuing process of reappraising, rediscovering and reconstructing ecclesiastical traditions and witnesses from past failures and idolatries. It is committed to ordering and re-ordering ecclesiastical traditions and witnesses to meet up with the challenges of their contexts without compromising the substance of the Gospel in the process. In a reforming Church, emphasis is laid on the 'false ecclesiological visions/practices of the past,' which it engages in conversation, in the light of the life and work of the biblical Jesus Christ: on Him (Jesus Christ), the doctrine, ethical reflections and witnesses of the church stands and falls.

Evidently, this vision for doing theology and being the *laos tou Theou* can provide the Church with a new vision, language and practices for doing theology in knowledge Nigerian societies that bear the brunt of the COC today. These false ecclesiastical traditions and witnesses are by-products of the COC rooted ideological missionary enterprises which were crafted and transposed to our context by the sending mission agencies/nation states with a view to also transform Nigerian believers/adherents into Europeans/Americans/Arabs. They have served out their purposes in knowledge Nigerian societies of today, hence the need for this radical approach/focus on doing theology and being the Church today.

This vision for a reforming church represents a radical approach/focus on doing theology which draws strength from Scripture to emphasize are forming witness of the *laos tou Theou*, in which the authority of church traditions and witnesses are located in the Word of God. Its approach to interpretation of Scripture is *Scriptura Civitate Interpretata* (Scripture interpreted in the light of public issues; in the light of context). It stresses that the only way that the *missio Dei* (God's mission) can truly be the heart of catholic and evangelical ministry will be through the 'continuing conversion of the church.' According to B. F. Fubara Manuel, 'this mission of God works through the Church and through the events of history and providence, gradually shaping all of reality to God's designed end...the concept of *missio Dei*, when well understood, would allow for a humble self-assessment for the Church. This is an assessment which is conscious not only of its limits and

earthliness or worldliness, but also of the need for God's grace....' Renewal of persons and shaping the otherness of the Christian communities are also constitutive of the central concern of this radical vision/focus for doing theology by the Church.

This radical visionary approach/focus for doing theology and ministry represents a restorative project, which rejects unquestioned consensus from the past, which claims catholicity and /authenticity simply because such a claim is always believed everywhere by everyone. It is also constant in its stance that the fallible nature of the Church calls for a constant *emper reformanda Secundum Verbi Dei* (continuing reformation in the light of the word of God) as well as *Scriptura Civitate Interpretata* because this radical approach/focus on doing theology seeks a reforming society.

**Reforming Society:** In this article, a reforming society is one which has at the core of its Christian identity and visionary enterprises a practice-based commitment to continuing transformation. It is concerned with ordering and re-ordering its structures, politics/policies, economy, citizenry, etc, with godly ethos with a view to transforming the resultant community(ies) into a milieu (milieu) where the *voluntas revelata Dei* is embodied as *fidem quaerens intellectum* in order to set up, grow and sustain the standard of life and practices. Right from its historical origin (visionary practices, reflections and identity), biblical Christianity is a religion that seeks to transform and develop human beings, their societies and all other members of creation to serve their originally created purpose in Jesus Christ. In other words, a reforming society speaks about a radical approach/focus to doing theology, which draws from the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ to challenge and inspire believers to a continuing transformation and modification of their ethical lives with a view to also liberate creation from its perennial bondage and to manifest as the children of God as well.

This radical approach/focus on doing theology can provide the Church a more substantive response to the lamentation of the epistle to the Romans chapter 8 verses 19-23, which says: "The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage of decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.' This radical approach/focus on doing theology has the capacity to challenge and inspire the Church's theological witness to a more meaningful engagement with the SDGs especially as it has to do with ending poverty, environmental protection, etc.

According to the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), the SDGs, otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 goals build on the successes of the

Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities. The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices now to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations. They provide us with a common plan and agenda to tackle some of the pressing challenges facing our world such as poverty, climate change and conflict.<sup>22</sup>

This radical approach/focus to doing theology will demand and inspire all God-seekers to substantiate their faiths by also finding something doable, which can contribute meaningfully towards the growth and development of the ecology, economy, politics, polities, social relationships, etc, of their societies. In other words, it will not permit the Church's ecclesiastical traditions and witnesses to continue to feign pseudo-innocence towards the need to engage non-Christian faith practitioners as partners in progress in the *missio Dei*. Its visionary approach towards the *missio Dei* will inter alia; include engaging in concrete ways to realizing the SDGs as a theological witness which permits people of all faith/cultures to contribute in growing and improving the ecology, the GDP, GNP and per capita income of their societies.

In addition, this radical approach/focus on doing theology can also provide the Christian faith with the needed resources to tame the ferocious tides of the COC which Sylvanus Udoiem and Ogbu Kalu have lamented on, as the catalyst on which the nexus of the threads of religious violence connect and revolve in knowledge Nigerian societies. From the Nigerian experience of the COC, the creation that pleads for liberation from its perennial bondage of decay also includes the conglomerate of nations which Britain amalgamated in 1914 and christened Nigeria. One of its most distressing legacies is the said Christian-Muslim rivalry which heats up the polity and politics of Nigeria. Thus this radical approach/focus on doing theology can also challenge and inspire the Church to engage in the pursuit of the shalom of society as an aspect of her Christian witness of the *missio Dei* and as an indispensable political responsibility of subordinate believers in Jesus Christ.

To believers in Jesus Christ, bearing the cross as the Lord commands it is in essence, a political responsibility which also defines the identity of Christian witness as *martyria* (personality/identity), *martyria* or *martyrion* (testimony); and the *martyreion* or *diamartyresthai* (act of bearing witness).<sup>23</sup> It is about a radical approach/focus to doing theology, which is concerned with continuing inquiry about a historical heritage, which as Dietrich Bonhoeffer has emphasized, is more about human beings who strive hard to give an account of themselves about the present as it has been taken on by God in Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup> A reforming church thirsts for a reforming society which thrives on a reforming economy.

Reforming Economy: This article reflects on reforming economy as that approach to growing the economy of a given society, which is visibly committed to critiquing, modifying and multiplying its sources for wealth, wealth creation, job and job creation, human capital development, etc. It is concerned with concrete realization of the fullness of Christ, which as this author has shown elsewhere, is about a visionary reflection on Kingdom practices and philosophies that seek to re-present the common calling of humankind as a Christocentric social ethics. In his reflection, this visionary pursuit of Christ centred Kingdom ethics reinterprets and presents its view on the Pauline phrase 'the fullness of Christ' to mean a Christocentric ministry of the whole people of God as the true meaning of the phrase. Here the distribution and multiplicity of ministries represents a specific work of grace. That is, that which demands corresponding ethical responses from its beneficiaries. This vision for social practices suggests a standard for a distinctive Christian ethics, which the Christ-event inaugurates and sustains as Kingdom ethics.<sup>25</sup>

This bespeaks of a radical approach/focus on doing theology, which is crucial for the theological vision and social ethics of the Nigerian church today. It provides us with a more substantive theological interpretation and appropriation of the meaning and implications of the diversity of gifts in New Testament thought in Nigerian knowledge societies which bear the brunt of the COC today. Such theological meaning and implications of the diversity of gifts in New Testament thought includes committed engagement in this radical approach/focus on doing theology: it challenges and inspires the Church to generate, install and sustain royal priests in all sectors of the Nigerian economy to also embrace engagement with economy as a critical aspect of their witness of the *missio Dei* as a lived, living and livable historical reality that permits all peoples to participate in its realization.

In this approach/focus on doing theology, the subordinate believer draws on moral alms to live out the Christian life as a potential moral agent, who can also take society beyond its traditional boundaries. Here we have a faith which to use Yoder's expression, 'that assigns personal moral responsibility to those who had no legal or moral status in their culture, and makes them decision makers. It gives them responsibility for viewing their status in society not as simple meaningless decree for fate but as their own meaningful witness and ministry, as an issue about which they can make a choice.' This approach/focus also challenges its believers and adherents to allow Scripture to form and reform their identity and witnesses in the midst of their often perplexing experiences in life.

Furthermore, this approach/focus on doing theology will also challenge and inspire the Church's witness towards active contribution in raising and installation of Christ centred leaders who will also work to turn the heart of the children back to their parents and their parents back to their children. Anya O. Anya has said on the Nigerian

experience, 'it is as if our leaders and their followers have lost all sense of what is right and what is functional in a proper human society. We seem to have lost sense of the dividing line between that which is good and bad, as well as the intolerable and the unacceptable. We no longer have a sense of what the moral imperative in a society should be. That is, the non-negotiable and absolute values that cannot be trifled with or ignored in a human society.' In this radical approach/focus on doing theology, a reforming economy is also concerned with human capital development.

Elsewhere, Anya has shown that human capital development implies building an appropriate balance and critical mass of human resource base. It is an approach to social transformation and development, which also seeks to provide an enabling environment for all individuals to be fully engaged in contributing to national development efforts. Human capital development also provides opportunities for all persons to develop to their fullest potentials through education, training and motivation while creating the enabling environment for everyone to become somebody in national development. For him, any effort to increase human knowledge, enhance skills and productivity and to stimulate innovativeness, creativity and resourcefulness of persons is an effort towards human capital development.<sup>28</sup> This perspective on human capital development challenge places weighty demands on the Church's approach/focus towards doing theology in knowledge Nigerian societies today.

Such demand for a radical approach/focus to doing theology is under obligation to also proclaim that to make significant contributions towards nation building, social transformation and development is an indispensable aspect of a meaningful pursuit of the *missio Dei* in knowledge Nigerian societies which bear the brunt of the pains of the COC today. A meaningful pursuit of the *missio Dei* must also recognize that poor human capital development questions the meaningfulness of the Church's witness of her faith in a context where hunger, starvation, poverty, disease, brain drain, capital flight, political and economic instabilities are consequences of scarcity of human capital development; as they are evident in Nigeria today. It will also proclaim that poor human capital development greatly impedes optimization of available potentials and opportunities to improve the society and enhance the quality of life of the citizens. This radical approach/focus on doing theology also holds that human capital development directly influences and positively correlates with economic and social indicators such as GDP, GNP, income per capita, life expectancy, literacy rate and the quality of infrastructure among other things. It is very convinced that these issues, which make up human capital development are indispensable components of a meaningful pursuit of the *missio Dei* as a lived, living and a livable historical reality in knowledge African especially, Nigerian societies today.

The climax of divine self-disclosure as Kwame Bediako has shown was not in a set of documented religious formulae or theological propositions. It was rather encapsulated in a

life, that is, in a human life which could be seen, looked upon and touched. That quality of human life was such that it provided, and continues to provide, clues of its recognition as truly divine in its origin. It was also truly human in its manifestation and this provides the Christian affirmation with the warrant for its claim. And this claim is that the divine-human life to which it bears witness is the light of the world and the life and hope of the whole of humankind. The goal of this approach/focus on doing theology today is community development.

### **Conclusion: Community Development as the Penultimate Goal**

A keen reader of this article will notice that the project is tailored towards community development. According to Karel TH August, Community development is a unique model of development as well as the oldest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century models of development, with its origin in the Cambridge Summer Conference where it was first described as 'a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation, and if possible on the initiative, of the community...should this community movement not be forthcoming spontaneously, techniques should be used for arousing and stimulating it in order secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement.'

The Early History of community development especially that which was stated by the Institute for Rural Reconstruction underscored that the aim was: '...to bring back life in all its completeness, making the villagers self-reliant and self-respectful, acquainted with the cultural tradition of their own country and competent to make an efficient use of modern resources to the fullest development of their physical, social, economic and intellectual conditions.' A meaningful community development process takes charge of the conditions and factors that influence a community and changes the quality of life and commitment of its members for better.

Sadly, Hennie Swanepoel and Frik De Beer have lamented that community development is the most abused form of development over the last five decades. It was used to placate unsatisfied people; get development done in a cheap way; soften up the people before the government bulldozers moved in; indoctrinate people to get their blessings for programmes that have very little benefits for them; etc. From their perspective, this is a very serious issue because community development is about empowerment and participation which must adopt a 'bottom-up' process as the vehicle for the very human process of empowerment.<sup>32</sup> The Nigerian experience is not an exception from this abuse of community experience: Anya's lamentation stated above can attest to it.

Given the evident impact of the COC in Nigerian knowledge societies, it becomes clear that doing theology in such context must as a matter of urgency, strive to draw from godly ethos in order to strengthen the capacity of people with a view to transform them into royal priests who are concretely committed to any God-centred effort

to increase human knowledge, enhance skills and productivity and to stimulate innovativeness, creativity and resourcefulness of persons. Evident in their consciousness is the fact that the core of their Christian identity and visionary enterprises is on a practice-based commitment to continuing transformation, ordering and re-ordering of the structures, politics/policies, economy, citizenry, etc, with godly ethics with a view to transforming their resultant community(ies) into a milieu (milieu) where the voluntas revelata Dei is embodied as fides quaerens intellectum in order to set up, grow and sustain the standard of life and practices.

For them, doing theology is about seeing themselves as Christ's martyrs (personality/identity), whose martyrion or martyrion (testimony) proclaims their martyrion or diamartyresthai (act of bearing witness) as a public theologically rooted effort towards human capital/community development, ecological protection, promotion and preservation, among other things. For them, doing theology also speaks about rediscovering and restoring the original vision for community development, which also labours to strengthen the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens irrespective of their creedal/religious affiliations with a view to shape and determine change in their communities.

The UN as an instance defines community development as follows: "Community Development is a *process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative.*" From this UN understanding, community development speaks about a way of strengthening societies by prioritizing the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policies. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organizing around specific themes or policy initiatives.

Secondly, doing theology in such COC-ridden contexts seek societies that are committed to playing crucial roles in supporting active democratic life by among other things, building up, encouraging and promoting the self-confidence/ voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable persons and their communities, as an indispensable godly spirituality, reflections and practices. This in other words, also means that doing theology in such context must be concretely and actively involved in seeking meaningful ways to realize the SDGs as a theological witness that permits all peoples to play active roles in growing and developing the GDP, GNP, income per capita, life expectancy, literacy rate and the quality of infrastructure among other things, in the process. It is visibly committed to critiquing, modifying and multiplying their (societies) sources for wealth, wealth creation, job and job creation, human capital development, etc with a view to concrete realization of the fullness of Christ in the New Testament thought, to mean a visionary reflection on Kingdom practices and philosophies that seek to re-present the



common calling of humankind as Christocentric social ethics.

Thus, the said big question of 'what would doing theology mean in knowledge Nigerian societies' has been answered in this paper and it is 'going public and ensuring that its believers/adherents especially the Church members are actively committed in serving the Lord and at the same time seeking to rule their areas of daily endeavours with godly ethics, for the Lord and to His glory and excellence (2Pet 1: 4) through Christ centred community groups, organisations and networks; and by providing opportunities for all persons irrespective of their creedal affiliations to develop to their fullest potentials through education, training and motivation while creating the enabling environment for everyone to become God-fearing somebody in his/her community development.' It speaks about a true visionary approach to and focus on community development, which embodies a set of core theological values/social principles which includes respect for human dignity, human rights, social inclusion and respect for diversity as well as specific skills and knowledge base that are rooted in reflections on and pursuit of godliness in the society. In short, it is about a Christ centred reflection on and pursuit of godliness in societies that bear the brunts of the legacies of the COC: it is also committed to action(s) that helps people to recognize and develop their ability and potential with a view to organize themselves to respond to problems and needs of common interest, with concrete Christ centred ethos in a knowledge society.

## References

1. Anya, A O. 2011. "Nigeria: The Human Capital Challenge" in Nigeria: Half a Century of Progress and Challenges, Ikokwu, Constance-Chigor( eds.). Nigeria: True Expression Press. 2008. Universities, Knowledge Societies and Development – Values, Institutions and Capacities. Uturu, Nigeria: Abia State University.
2. Bediako, Kwame. 2004. Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience. New York: Orbis Book.
3. Boesak, Allan Aubrey. 1983. Farewell to Innocence: Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power. Kampen: JH Kok.
4. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 2005. Ethics: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 6. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
5. Daniel Migliore. 2004. Faith Seeking Understanding. Michigan: Grand Rapids.
6. De Gruchy, JW. 2007. Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre, International Journal of Public Theology 1:
7. Fubara-Manuel, BF. 2007. In the Missio Dei: Reflections on the Being and Calling of the Church in the Sovereign Mission of God. Calabar, Nigeria: Presby Press.
8. Guder, L. Darrell. 2000. The Continuing Conversion of The Church. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing.
9. Hendriks, Hans Jurgens. 2004. Studying Congregations in Africa. Cape Town: Lux Verbi Press.
10. Huntington, Samuel P. 1996. The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order. New York: Touchstone Books.
11. Igi-Global.NA.Knowledge Society. Available Online: <http://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/knowledge-society/16456>. Accessed, September 29, 2015
12. Kalu, Ogbu U. 2008. African Pentecostalism: An Introduction. New York: Oxford University Press.
13. Koopman, Nico. 2013. "Hope, Vulnerability and Disability? A Theological Perspective" in Searching for Dignity: Conversations on Human Dignity, Theology and Disability. Claassens, Julie, Swartz, Leslie and Hansen, Len, eds., 43-54. Stellenbosch: Sun Media. 2007. Confessing and Embodying Catholicity of the Church in the Context of Glocality. Scriptura Vol 94 No 1: 29-39/185.
14. 2007. Some Theological and Anthropological Perspectives on Human Dignity and Human Rights. Scriptura Vol 95 No 2: 177-185.
15. Leith, John. 1993. Basic Christian Doctrine (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press. 1981. Introduction to the Reformed Tradition. London: Westminster John Knox Press.
16. Moltmann, Jurgen. 2007. On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
17. Ndukwe, Olo. 2013. Celebration of Life: Religion, Mission and the Victims of Society. Nigeria, Ohafia: Precious Grace Publications. 2011. Among the Nations: Rebranding the Church for a Disappointed World. Enugu, Nigeria: Agbotech.
18. Ohcc.NA. <http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/courses/community-development-for-health-promoters/module-one-concepts-values-and-principles/defini-0> Accessed 13/7/2015.
19. Okafor, F.U. 1997. New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic & Religious Conflicts in Nigeria. Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
20. Stackhouse, Max L. 2011. Civil Religion, Political Theology and Public Theology: What's the Difference? Covenantal Justice in a Global Era. Institute for Reformed Theology, Virginia. Public Lecture. Available Online: <http://reformedtheology.org/SiteFiles/PublicLectures/StackhousePL.html> Accessed October 12, 2011. 2004. Civil Religion, Public Theology: What's the Difference? Political Theology, Vol 5 No 3.
21. Storrar, William & Morton, Andrew R. 2004. Public Theology for the 21st Century. New York: T&T Clark.
22. Swanepoel, Hennie & De Beer, Frik. 2011. Community Development: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty (Fifth Edition). Lansdowne, South Africa: Juta and Co Ltd.
23. Theguardian.com. NA. Sustainable Development. Available Online: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/19/sustainable-development-goals-united-nations>. Accessed November 28, 2015.
24. Udoidem, Sylvanus I. 1997. 'Religion in the Political Life of Nigeria: A Survey of Religious-Related Crises in Nigeria Since Independence' in A New Strategy for Curbing Ethnic & Religious Conflicts in Nigeria, Okafor, F.U. (ed.). Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 152-183.
25. UN. 2015. Sustainable Development Goals. Available Online: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> Accessed October 10, 2016.
26. UNDP. 2016. Sustainable Development Goals. Available Online: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html> Accessed October 10, 2016.

27. Wikipedia.NA.Clash of Civilizations. Available Online: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clash\\_of\\_Civilizations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clash_of_Civilizations)  
Accessed September 22, 2016.
28. Yoder, John Howard. 2001. Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World. Pennsylvania: Herald Press. \_\_\_\_\_ . 1994. The Politics of Jesus: Behold the Man! Our Victorious Lamb. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing.