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## **Reconciliation, a Road to Freedom, Unity and Development (Gen 32:3-33:20): Lessons for Nigeria as a Nation**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Jacob and Esau are the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. With the active and masterful connivance of Rebekah, Jacob, the younger of the two, deceitfully obtained from their father, Isaac, the final blessing he had intended for Esau, his first son. The ugly result is that, on account of the threat to his life by Esau, Jacob had to flee into exile, to Laban his uncle. However, after 20 years, he had to return to Canaan, at the behest of Yahweh, but had also to confront his otherwise bitter and estranged brother in the process, as narrated in Gen 32:3-33:20. Thus, although Jacob was initially highly dreadful of this encounter, the two brothers admirably reconciled during that meeting thereby leaving an example of perennial worth to all human beings. This article deeply dwells on this narrative in order to bring out its important details and emphases. The method employed in the study is sociological-theological. This is augmented with the Historical Critical Method of Exegesis so as to interpret the text under study. Through these methods, this paper highlights the fact that even though reconciliation is often difficult to arrive at in the face of conflicts, it is ultimately a blessing and greatly rewarding when achieved. On that score, it becomes highly recommended that all toe the praise-worthy line of these two brothers in the face of conflicts so as to avoid war or aggression which is its unwholesome alternative. This recommendation is especially pertinent to Nigeria, the fast-crumbling giant of Africa, where Christians, especially those in government, are particularly called upon to help to engender this national spirit among its citizens – an aspect that has sadly eluded them since the country's independence. Significantly, therefore, this paper is a strong appreciation of the reconciliatory example of these twin brothers, with the suggestion, after going down the memory lane, that it is only such a development that would help to move Nigeria forward as a nation from its present debilitating quagmire and national decay.*

**KEY WORDS:** conflict, reconciliation, forgiveness, lessons, Christians, national progress.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, were in conflict, so to speak, right from their mother's womb and even at birth. Its climax, however, was Jacob's deceitful reception of their

father Isaac's final blessing, instead of Esau, the first son. Threatened, therefore, to be killed by a highly infuriated Esau, Jacob fled into exile, to Laban his uncle, at Haran. But, directed by Yahweh, he had to return to Canaan after twenty years, a journey that brought him face to face with his dreaded elder brother but which ended, happily, in their commendable reconciliation.

This paper has studied this reconciliation of these two brothers as narrated in Gen 32:3-33:20, highlighting its important details and emphases especially through the scientific exegesis of some of the relevant texts. Extolling this reconciliation as admirable, this write up also highlights its possible lessons to all human beings – since life is often filled with conflicts, and these are best solved through reconciliation rather than its unwholesome alternative, war or aggression. To this end, this paper also tries to bring these lessons nearer home to Nigeria where, through the instrumentality of Christians, especially, such an approach could be engendered in the nation's national polity. This effort is to smoothen out past conflicts as much as would be possible through national dialogue and reconciliation. In so doing, Nigeria would move forward from its present situation of chaos and decadence to a prosperous and vibrant future in peace and unity.

### **Brief Profile of Jacob and Esau**

Abraham was the father of Isaac whose story is recorded in Gen 24 – 26 and Isaac, as already hinted, was the father of Esau and Jacob (cf. Gen 25:19-28). The circumstances of the birth of these twin sons, Esau and Jacob, begins already to signal the primacy of the younger brother, Jacob, to the elder, Esau. Isaac earlier prayed for his wife Rebekah, who was barren, and she conceived the twins. The struggle between the two children within her womb shows already, as Yahweh also revealed (cf. also Heb 9,10-13), the division that would exist between those two brothers (Gen 25,22-23).

During their birth, "the first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob" (Gen 25:24-26). "When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob (Gen 25:27-28). Staying closer to his mother, Jacob developed astuteness and cleverness. In this cleverness, he obtained Esau's right of primogeniture (cf. also Heb 12,16) as Esau casually sold his birthright to him – even under oath (Gen 25,29-34).

In character, therefore, Jacob is pictured as industrious and prudent, while Esau is shown to be impetuous, rash and not careful of the future. The casual sale of his birthright, fortified by an oath – as already mentioned – would ultimately justify Jacob's right to trick his brother out of the all-important blessing due the first-born. Hence, as the story unfolds, even though both boys equally

have the favour of one of the parents, Jacob shows the qualities that would lead to God's choice of him over Esau.<sup>1</sup>

### **Reconciliation in the Context of the Conflict between Jacob and Esau**

Reconciliation is the removal of enmity, bridging over a quarrel in such a way that a good and right relationship is restored. The best way to achieve this, therefore, is to grapple with the root cause of the enmity.<sup>2</sup> Hence, forgiveness is also strongly involved in reconciliation: It is the wiping out of an offence from memory and can be affected only by the one affronted. Once eradicated, the offense no longer conditions the relationship between the offender and the one affronted, and harmony is restored between the two of them. To that end, the Bible actually stresses both human forgiveness and divine forgiveness.<sup>3</sup>

The book of Genesis records a number of striking stories regarding Jacob as well as some stories of conflict and struggle between Jacob and Esau, two of which have already been noted above. But the conflict reaches its climax, so to speak, in Isaac's blessing of Jacob – with the help of his mother, Rebekah – instead of the elder brother, Esau. It is a deceitful trick skilfully masterminded by Rebekah herself (Gen 27:1-40). On discovering this, Esau is highly infuriated and swears to kill Jacob after the death of their father Isaac (Gen 27:41). Terrified, Jacob flees – again with the help of his mother – to his uncle Laban in Haran (Gen 27:42-45; 28:1-5; 29:1-14). At Haran, Jacob marries Laban's two daughters, Leah and Rachel, takes concubines, bears 12 sons and a daughter and becomes prosperous (Gen 29:15-30:43). At Yahweh's behest (Gen 31: 3), however, he leaves Haran (Gen 31:20-22) so as to return to the land of his birth, where he has to confront his brother, Esau.<sup>4</sup> This is what he succeeds in doing in our text, Gen 32:3-33:20, hence the emphasis of this paper.

### **Gen 32:3-33:20: Textual Delimitation**

Gen 32:3-33:20 is a unit dealing with the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau. It also concludes the Jacob-Esau story which began in Gen 27.<sup>5</sup>

The unit begins by stating how Jacob began that reconciliatory move by sending “messengers to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom” (Gen 32:3), practically pleading with

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<sup>1</sup> L. BOADT, “Genesis”, in *The International Bible Commentary* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 380.

<sup>2</sup> D. WILLIAMS, ed., *New Concise Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1989) 176.

<sup>3</sup> J. S. KSELMAN, “Forgiveness”, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 831.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. <https://www.indisputably.org/>: A. SCHNEIDER, “Jacob's Reconciliation with Esau: A Scared Story of Restorative Justice”, *Indisputably: Linking Dispute Resolution Scholarship, Education, and Practice* (November 9, 2015) 1. Accessed January 11, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> C. WESTERMANN, *Genesis 12 – 36* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985) 523.

Esau to be well disposed towards him (Gen 32:5). This is certainly a new theme from the previous one (Gen 31:2-32:2) which dwells on how Jacob ended his sojourn with Laban his uncle in Paddan-Aram and virtually fled from him – even though Laban eventually pursued him and caught up with him. Thus, Gen 31:55 reports the final separation of Laban with Jacob and his family while Gen 32:1-2 concludes that section, saying how Jacob also “went on his way.” He then sends messengers to Esau, as already said, thereby introducing our pericope.

Gen 34, on the rape of Dinah, is also clearly thematically different from our present pericope. Hence, Gen 33:18-20 concludes this section on the reconciliation of these two brothers, as these verses form part of Jacob’s itinerary to the promised land of Canaan which he embarks upon from Paddan-Aram, at the behest of Yahweh (Gen 31:2-3), and which he concludes after his encounter with Esau in this pericope. Jacob had even prayed for this earlier (Gen 28:21). Hence, that his return is momentous is indicated by his building an altar and praying, just as Abraham had done on his arrival at Canaan (cf. Gen 12:5-9; 13:3-4). Therefore, vv. 18-20 fittingly conclude the story of Jacob’s return to his homeland within which the reconciliation with Esau takes place, just as they also anticipate the next episode of the rape of Dinah in Gen 34 – as Jacob is now fully settled.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, Gen 32:3-33:20 is a unit. Wenham actually divides the whole pericope into seven neatly composite scenes as follows:

- Scene 1: Jacob’s embassy to Esau (32:4-7)
- Scene 2: Jacob prepares to meet Esau (vv. 8-22)
  - Jacob’s fears (vv. 8-9)
  - Jacob’s prayer (vv. 10-13)
  - Jacob’s gifts (vv. 14-22)
- Scene 3: Jacob and wives cross Yabbok (vv. 23-24)
- Scene 4: Jacob wrestles with a “man” (vv. 25-33)
- Scene 5: Jacob and Esau reunited (33:1-15)
  - Jacob approaches (vv. 1-3)
  - Greetings exchanged (vv. 4-11)
  - Esau’s invitation turned down (vv. 12-15)
- Scene 6: Jacob and Esau part (vv. 16-17)
- Scene 7: Conclusion and Preview: Jacob settles in Canaan (vv. 18-20).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> G. WENHAM, *Genesis 16 – 50* (Word Biblical Commentary 2; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994) 287.

<sup>7</sup> WENHAM, *Genesis 16 – 50*, 287.

### **The Biblical Text of Gen 32:3-33:20**

This text is ultimately made up of three major parts: a) Jacob's Preparation for the meeting with Esau (32:3-22), b) Jacob's struggle with God (32:23-33) and c) Jacob's meeting with Esau (33:1-20).<sup>8</sup>

#### **a) Jacob's Preparation for the meeting with Esau (Gen 32:3-22)**

Highly fearful of a revenge from Esau, Jacob expresses it clearly in his prayer (vv. 9-12): "for I fear him, lest he come and slay us all, the mothers with the children" (v. 11). Thus, as a preliminary step to meeting with Esau and in full readiness for the reconciliation with him, Jacob sends messengers to his estranged brother. Through them, he states his message explicitly: "in order that I may find favour in your sight" (32:5). But the messengers return with the rather disturbing news of Esau's advancement with 400 men.

Realizing that words alone may no more suffice in pacifying his brother, Jacob goes on to adopt desperate measures to win him over: taking immediate defensive measures, in panic, to protect his party (vv. 8-10), then praying earnestly for Yahweh to save him from Esau (vv. 10-13) and, finally, sending a series of gifts to him (vv. 14-22). All these moves have but one purpose on the part of Jacob: to "appease" Esau with them, so that "perhaps he will accept me" (v. 20).

#### **b) Jacob's struggle with God (Gen 32:23-33)**

That same night, after dispatching the gifts to Esau, "Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day" (v. 24) – a mysterious event, indeed.<sup>9</sup> Jacob does not release him until the "angel" has blessed him and given him a new name: "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and prevailed" (v. 28). Then Jacob realizes that he has been wrestling with God: "So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved'" (v. 30).

#### **c) Jacob's meeting with Esau (Gen 33:1-20).**

Still limping because of his wounded hip from the encounter of the previous night, Jacob finally meets his brother Esau. It is this scene which brings the story of Jacob and Esau (Gen 27 -33) to an end.

Although Jacob is still afraid, he has, nevertheless, been emboldened by the last encounter with God to be able to meet Esau his brother, coming towards him with his four hundred men – as already mentioned. Hence, Jacob divides his family into three groups, arranged in three different rows, but now, more courageously than before, "He himself went on before them" (Gen 33:1-3).

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. R. J. CLIFFORD – R. E. MURPHY, "Genesis", in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1994) 33-34.

<sup>9</sup> R. J. CLIFFORD – R. E. MURPHY, "Genesis", 33.

That encounter, which Jacob feared so much, now ends with reconciliation in a scene that is marked by conspicuous obeisance on his part (v. 3), in contrast to the simple acceptance by Esau.<sup>10</sup> Yet, Esau initially refuses to accept his brother's peace offerings: Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." But Jacob is insistent, saying, "No, I pray you, if I have found favour in your sight, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me. Accept, I pray you, my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." The Bible (RSV) then concludes: "Thus he urged him, and he took it" (vv. 9-11). Both are now reconciled.

### **Brief Exegesis<sup>11</sup>**

The story of the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau is clearly another high point in the book of Genesis. Wenham goes on to describe it in a summary that captures most of its aspects:

It is tense and dramatic; it is also puzzling and enigmatic. It apparently brings the sad story of fraternal strife to a happy and joyful resolution. It brings the exiled Jacob back to his homeland, the promised land of Canaan. Jacob's new name Israel presages a new character at peace with God and man. But as the closing scenes suggest, his relations with Esau remain uneasy, and the friendly Canaanites will soon prove to be the cause of Jacob's greatest shame. As often in Genesis, the narrative illustrates the triumph of the divine promises despite human folly and fallibility.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear from the biblical account that Jacob earnestly needed this reconciliation. He strongly desired to bring it about, as he attempts for the first time in twenty years to make contact with his brother Esau, now living in Seir, in southern Transjordan. This is clearly in accord with the underlying scheme of the entire Jacob-Esau story which is Jacob's flight in Gen 27 and his return to the Promised Land in Gen 32 – 33. The flight had been necessitated by his offense against Esau, already referred to above. But his return is only possible "through reconciliation or setting aside the long standing guilt."<sup>13</sup> To that end, Jacob's deferential language to Esau, through his messengers, is really notable: "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob ..." (32:5). He also concludes his instruction to those messengers on the same note: "and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favour in your sight" (v. 6).

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<sup>10</sup> R. J. CLIFFORD – ROLAND E. MURPHY, "Genesis", 34.

<sup>11</sup> In this section, the numbering of the verses in the Hebrew Text, the Masoretic Text, will naturally be followed when Hebrew words are cited. This numbering differs slightly from that of the English translations of Gen 32. Cf. Footnote "e" in the RSV.

<sup>12</sup> WENHAM, *Genesis 16 – 50*, 301.

<sup>13</sup> C. WESTERMANN, *Genesis 12 – 36* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985) 523.



The words, “my Lord” (*ā’dōnī*) and “your servant” (*a’bdkā*), which were also amply employed by Jacob during his actual encounter with Esau (cf. Gen 33: 5, 8, 13, 14 and 15) are deferentially touching. The same is also true of his conclusion “that I may find favour” (*limṣ’ō hēn*) “in your sight” (cf. also Gen 33:8 and 15). In Hebrew, *hēn*, means “grace” or “favour”. Hence, as used in this text and in the OT in general, it refers “to the positive disposition one person has toward another”<sup>14</sup> – and it is this disposition that Jacob is earnestly seeking for from his brother Esau, as already hinted above. Thus, as even oriental courtesy would not lead to such extravagant humility toward a twin brother, Jacob’s opening words in this text, as well as his continuous use of such words before his brother Esau, hint more at his fearfulness and guilty conscience, or at least constitute an attempt to reverse the relationship in which Esau would be Jacob’s servant (25:23; 27:40).<sup>15</sup> These also apply to his prayer (vv. 10-13) and the lavish gifts he sends to Esau (vv. 14-22).

After wrestling with a mysterious being, Jacob’s name is changed to Israel, as already mentioned (32:23-33). That encounter with an angel, or even God in the form of a stranger, is considered as one of the most powerful scenes in the entire OT. Here Jacob is subjected to a test, like Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22. It is also similar to Jacob’s first encounter with Yahweh’s plans for him at Bethel in Gen 28. Therefore, the whole episode “signals the beginning of a new stage in his life,”<sup>16</sup> as it was, in reality, a test for his “fitness for the larger tasks that lay ahead.”<sup>17</sup> For after that incident, Jacob, the deceiver and supplanter, becomes “Israel,” “the victorious, blessed, god-wrestler.”<sup>18</sup> Naming the place Peniel, Jacob says, ‘For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved’ (v. 30). This outcome further emboldens him, as already noted, to finally meet Esau: If he has survived meeting God, he will survive his meeting with Esau.<sup>19</sup>

Before finally meeting his elder brother, Jacob bowed himself to the ground seven times – “a widely attested form of homage, fit for a king.”<sup>20</sup> But Jacob is doing more than acknowledging Esau’s lordship. Rather, he is further trying to undo the great act of deception whereby he cheated Esau of his blessing. Therefore, he insists on making presents to Esau in an attempt to return to

<sup>14</sup> D. N. FREEDMAN – J. R. LUNDBOM, “hānan”, in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. V (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1986) 24.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. WENHAM, *Genesis 16 – 50*, 290.

<sup>16</sup> BOADT, “Genesis”, 384.

<sup>17</sup> E. A. SPEISER, *Genesis* (The Anchor Bible 1; New York: Doubleday, 1962) 257.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.indisputably.org/>: A. SCHNEIDER, “Jacob’s Reconciliation with Esau: A Scared Story of Restorative Justice”, *Indisputably: Linking Dispute Resolution Scholarship, Education, and Practice*, 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> WENHAM, *Genesis 16 – 50*, 297.

<sup>20</sup> M. G. KLINE, “Genesis”, in D. GUTHRIE – al, Ed., *New Bible Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1970) 105.

him the blessing (cf. 33:11) which should have been his.<sup>21</sup> But that meeting, dreaded by Jacob, proved to be a reconciling reunion between the hitherto estranged brothers, as Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept (33:5). “When Jacob joins in weeping with Esau, the ice is broken; the brothers are reconciled, and verbal communication can begin.”<sup>22</sup> True indeed! The “verbal communication” actually did begin between those two brothers, going further to solidify their reconciliation. The end result is that, despite his initial reluctance, Esau finally accepts Jacob’s presents (33:9-11). According to Westermann, this is actually a masterful narrative technique with which the narrator of the story brings the reconciliation saga to its appreciably admirable climax:

Esau greets Jacob as one brother greets the other after a long separation (v. 4); Jacob greets Esau as a vassal greets his patron with a ceremonial which has its origin in the royal court; there is a display of solemnity as becomes rank, the seven-fold obeisance, the submissive address, the presentation of gifts of homage. These two types of greeting are so skillfully worked together that the contrast speaks for itself. The ceremonial greeting of Jacob (vv. 1b-3, 6-7) forms the frame to Esau’s warm greeting (vv. 4-5) so as to dominate the whole episode.<sup>23</sup>

The ultimate outcome becomes the wonder of reconciliation: Israel now sees “the face of God” in the face of Esau, the very brother who had sworn to kill him!<sup>24</sup>

In other words, Esau has also changed. Initially, as already said, he had been waiting for his father to die, so that he could take his revenge on Jacob and kill him. But here, completely unexpectedly, he receives Jacob with unimaginable openness and brotherliness – and both of them wept together (v. 4). He even accepts Jacob’s gifts, just after a little reluctance (v. 9), and warmly invites him (Jacob) to come and live with him in Seir (vv. 12, 14-15). Such warmth, after so many years of hatred, makes this scene one of the most beautiful in Scripture. The full and free forgiveness that Esau displays toward his deceitful brother is, as Jacob himself recognizes, a model of divine love, “for I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me” (v. 10).<sup>25</sup> In short, the first divine blessing for the new man “Israel” is this complete reconciliation with his wronged brother, Esau,<sup>26</sup> and this reconciliation is only possible because through all his actions to Esau, Jacob “confesses his guilt and the other forgives, without either act being

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<sup>21</sup> WENHAM, *Genesis 16 – 50*, 298.

<sup>22</sup> WENHAM, *Genesis 16 – 50*, 298.

<sup>23</sup> WESTERMANN, *Genesis 12 – 36*, 524.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.indisputably.org/>: A. SCHNEIDER, “Jacob’s Reconciliation with Esau: A Scared Story of Restorative Justice”, *Indisputably: Linking Dispute Resolution Scholarship, Education, and Practice*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> WENHAM, *Genesis 16 – 50*, 304.

<sup>26</sup> BOADT, “Genesis”, 384.



specifically mentioned as such. Restitution is part of Jacob's confession: in the gifts Jacob restores the stolen blessing to his brother."<sup>27</sup>

However, even though the Peniel experience dramatically changed Jacob, it did not completely change his character, as the new Israel still has some features of the old Jacob. Hence, even though reconciled, Jacob has no intention of joining his brother or accepting a party from Esau's 400 men as a retinue.<sup>28</sup> They both go their own ways, but ultimately reconciled.

### **Possible Lessons**

The experience of Jacob in our text points strongly to one thing – that reconciliation is generally not easy. It could stretch the individuals concerned to their very limits – but, ultimately, with rewarding results: "It involves risk; comes with sacrifice, even injury; and takes faith and trust in one's God. The 'Israel' of Torah teaches us, however, that when we do this; and are finally able to see 'the face of God' in the face of our enemy and reconcile with our brother; we will be blessed."<sup>29</sup>

Reconciliation also naturally involves forgiveness especially from the injured party. In fact, to be true, it presumes forgiveness. Clearly, Esau has forgiven his brother in this text especially as manifested from the remarkable contrast between their greetings to each other that actually speaks for itself. His warm welcome, Westermann observes, includes the forgiveness:

Esau has forgiven his brother's guilt, either because he was moved thereto by the avowal of guilt implied in the gesture and the gifts or because what happened so long ago is now no longer important to him. The gestures are of great significance in the world in which this story takes place. They are essential and indispensable elements of communication.<sup>30</sup>

The alternative to reconciliation is war or aggression and the reconciliation between these two brothers hovers on the edge of that alternative. From our text, Jacob is highly apprehensive and dreadful of that alternative from his brother – especially after learning of the 400 men advancing with him. But Esau's magnanimity to him tones down that tension tremendously. As these things take place before Jacob's final settlement in the promised land, the narrator is emphasizing that conflict between brothers can grow and extend beyond the family limits, even escalating to confrontation and war. But the true ability to rise above those conflicts ultimately demands their

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<sup>27</sup> WESTERMANN, *Genesis 12 – 36*, 524.

<sup>28</sup> R. J. CLIFFORD – ROLAND E. MURPHY, "Genesis", 34.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.indisputably.org/>: A. SCHNEIDER, "Jacob's Reconciliation with Esau: A Scared Story of Restorative Justice", 2

<sup>30</sup> WESTERMANN, *Genesis 12 – 36*, 525.

resolution by reconciliation – and reconciliation is still possible even when the concerned parties decide to part.<sup>31</sup>

In the final analysis, the nuclear family of Isaac and Rebekah, where Esau and Jacob were born and brought up, remains the point of origin of this entire crisis. Isaac showed clear preference to Esau while Rebekah, to Jacob. With Rebekah's active connivance, Jacob tricked Isaac and received the paternal blessing meant for Esau, resulting in the entire family being thrown into turmoil, until this reconciliation in our text. It has to be said, therefore, that for the proper wellbeing of the family, it is very important that parents exhibit a good dose of prudence and maturity in the treatment of all their children to avoid ruining their own family themselves. Else, the "ruin" may even continue in those children as is the case with Jacob himself who later becomes a victim of his own upbringing. For instance, "if Jacob had not shown such brazen partiality in loving Joseph, the animosity among his children could not have reached such a despicable height" in Gen 37.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Jacob is roundly deceived by those his very children with the blood of a kid smeared on the garment of Joseph, their brother, just as Jacob had deceived!<sup>33</sup> Training children is a very sensitive and involving task, demanding the very best from all those involved.

### Lessons for Nigeria as a Nation

Jesus seems to allude to the reconciling behaviour of Esau to Jacob during their meeting in our text in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, describing the greeting of the father to his returning son thus: "His father saw him, 'and ran and embraced him and kissed him'" (Luke 15:20). Paul also takes up the same theme, as he comments on God's work of reconciliation in Christ (2 Cor 5:16-21). In fact, the duty of making peace with the brother, the neighbour, is stressed throughout the Bible.<sup>34</sup> Jesus also emphasizes forgiveness of the neighbour as an obligation for all Christians, an emphasis shared by other NT texts.<sup>35</sup> But the behaviours of both Jacob and Esau in our text strongly emphasize that forgiveness and reconciliation are not just the onus of Christians. An offender, Christian and non Christian, has also to acknowledge his wrongs to make forgiveness and reconciliation easier and mutual – and it is here that one also reflects about Nigeria as a nation.

All the citizens of Nigeria, regardless of their creed and religion, have the natural obligation to work towards the growth and betterment of their country. But since this paper is strongly biblically

<sup>31</sup> WESTERMANN, *Genesis 12 – 36*, 530.

<sup>32</sup> E. U. DIM, "The Plot to kill Joseph by his Brothers (Gen 37:2-36): It's Place within the Joseph Story and Lessons for Christians in Nigeria", *International Journal of Academic and Applied Research (IJAAR)*, Vol. 6, no. 12 (December, 2022) 141.

<sup>33</sup> WENHAM, *Genesis 16 – 50*, 359.

<sup>34</sup> The relevant biblical texts include Lev 19:17-18; Ps 133; Prov 17:9,17; Matt 5:21-26; 1 John 4:12-21).

<sup>35</sup> Numerous NT texts emphasize forgiveness: Matt 5:7; 6:12, 14-15; Matt 18:15-17, 21-22; Luke 6:37; 11:4; 17:3-4; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13 and Philemon.

oriented, this writer would try to highlight more the important role of Christians in the matter under discussion – as Christians make up a substantial part of the nation’s population.<sup>36</sup> All things being equal, this numerical strength should really be advantageous to the healthy survival and development of Nigeria, as faith without good works is practically dead (James 2:17). To that end, it has to be observed that the emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation, as strongly recommended by Christ, does not lack in the Christian churches and assemblies, as it is constantly talked about in worship, homilies, Bible studies, faith-sharing and name it! What is of strong concern, however, is their application to nation building in Nigeria. It is here that more serious action is still needed – and that is what is being provoked in this paper, as already hinted above.

Nigeria is a country that is richly endowed in all aspects of its national life. But at the moment, all those endowments are not meaningfully evident in the day to day lives of most of her citizens. The chaotic state of affairs in the country, at present, is almost a signal for the very worst, ultimately. This writer has, however, dwelt on this situation elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> But what this paper would go ahead to highlight is that, according to informed observers, the present state of affairs has actually been building up gradually, almost unchecked, since the nation’s independence in 1960. There were then general insecurity, killings and counter killings, assassinations and counter assassinations, coups and counter coups all leading to the pogrom of 1966 in which mainly southerners, especially the Igbos, were butchered in Northern Nigeria. Between 8,000 and 30,000 Easterners, especially Igbos, were killed in that development.<sup>38</sup> Then came the civil war from 1967 to 1970 which again took its toll of over 100,000 military casualties as well as about 2,500,000 civilians who starved to death.<sup>39</sup> The end of that war ushered in, mainly, many years of military rule. Now the country has only had about 22 years of continuous civilian rule since 1999!

After all these years and difficulties, it becomes really incomprehensible that Nigerians have actually not sat down together, even once, to discuss their situation and the way forward as a nation! The attempt by President Goodluck Jonathan in 2014 has actually never seen the light of day! But there is no gainsaying the fact that if such a venture could be embarked upon successfully, it would help to answer the most important question which has preoccupied most Nigerians all these years; the same question asked by the late legendry musician Sony Okosun, in the 1970s: “Which way Nigeria?” It is the heartfelt answer to that question by all Nigerians which will help to reverse the disgusting situation and vicious circle in which Nigeria has found itself.

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<sup>36</sup> On the actual population of Christians in Nigeria, cf. DIM, “The Plot to kill Joseph by his Brothers (Gen 37:2-36): It’s Place within the Joseph Story and Lessons for Christians in Nigeria”, 146.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. DIM, “The Plot to kill Joseph by his Brothers (Gen 37:2-36): It’s Place within the Joseph Story and Lessons for Christians in Nigeria”, 143-146.

<sup>38</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1966-anti-igbo-pogrom>. Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigerian-civil-war>. Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2022.

It may, therefore, be necessary to remind the reader at this juncture, that after the many years of apartheid in South Africa, that country, under Nelson Mandela, established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which helped the citizens to deal with their wounded past and then forge ahead as a nation. In Rwanda, as well, after the pogrom of 1994, that country also had recourse to a traditional form of dispute resolution called *Gacaca*, to deal with the same situation, on the basis of restorative, and not retributive, justice – even apart from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) created by the international community.<sup>40</sup> Can Nigeria still keep pretending that all is well in its polity when all the indices are indicating otherwise? What with the deep-seated suspicion (if not actual hatred!) and distrust of many Nigerians against one another and some tribes against the others? When will this pretense stop and the true realities of this country become squarely faced by its citizens? This writer, therefore, emphasizes that the citizens of this country acutely need deep-seated forgiveness of one another, from the heart. This would naturally enhance the citizens' mutual reconciliation with one another. This is simply imperative, especially for the understated reasons:

Until we truly forgive those who have offended us, we carry within our hearts a bitterness which can poison every other aspect of our lives. Only when we truly and sincerely forgive the wrongs that have been done to us can we free ourselves from this burden. By continuing to nurse grievances against those who have done us wrong, we give them continuing power over us. With each remembrance of past wrongs we perpetuate the evil that has been done to us. Reconciliation and forgiveness is not a favour done to the offended, it also liberates those who suffer from the offenses.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, Nigerians need to live out in very practical terms the emphasis of the country's old National Anthem: "Though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand." Nigerians should really stand steadfastly together in brotherhood, if this country is to move forward.

It is here that the call actually becomes louder for all those in government, especially the Christians. Special appeal is here made, particularly, to those in the Executive and Legislative arms of government for the workability of this proposal. Since most people are truly fed up with the present state of affairs in the country, men and women of good will – who are indeed many (even when they are not Christians) – will certainly cooperate and align with good and noble ideas when they are brought up. The emphasis of this paper is, therefore, that such a noble idea be officially and insistently raised, in the first place and, then, be consistently and seriously sustained, for practicality. This is because it is only proper reconciliation, as has been demonstrated by Jacob

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<sup>40</sup> K. BISONG, "Second Special Synod for Africa and the Quest for Sustainable Reconciliation", *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 24 (June 2010) 69-70.

<sup>41</sup> K. BISONG, "Second Special Synod for Africa and the Quest for Sustainable Reconciliation", *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, 72.

and Esau in our text, which would ultimately lead Nigeria as nation – and, hence, all her citizens – to the much desired road of true freedom, unity and enduring development.

## CONCLUSION

The conflict between the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, is one which began in the nuclear family of Isaac and Rebekah. It reached its climax in the blessing of Jacob by Isaac instead of Esau the first born, a blessing deceitfully acquired by Jacob with the help of the mother, Rebekah. All this created a situation of turmoil in that family, generally, as well as serious discord between the two twin brothers, in particular. They, however, commendably reconciled as is narrated in Gen 32:3-33:20.

A scholarly study and analysis of this narrative has been undertaken in this paper. The admirable reconciliation arrived at by the two brothers, greatly facilitated by the evident forgiveness of his otherwise guilty and fearful younger brother by Esau, is presented as a point of serious reflection for all – just as the entire narrative is indeed laden with helpful insights and lessons. These, the writer further surmises, are especially important for Nigeria as a nation, going by the present societal difficulties and problems in that country – problems which have really not been meaningfully and realistically addressed since the country's independence. It all boils down to the fact that the mutual forgiveness and reconciliation among its citizens can no longer be ignored or taken for granted if the country would go forward in freedom, unity and progress.

Since Christians make up a large chunk of Nigeria's population, this writer thinks that, relying on God's grace, they have the capacity to help to gradually bring about this change, commencing with those in government. This is the yearning of all men and women of good will in Nigeria and this is also the yearning of the average Nigerians in the streets most of whom are now wallowing in avoidable poverty and deprivation.