

Archbishop Justin Welby has written about his hopes for Nigeria in this article published today in Nigeria's ThisDay newspaper:

The deliberate shooting of unarmed protestors in Lagos and other parts of Nigeria last week was an outrage. I say this as a human being, as a Christian, and as the leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion – which counts some 18 million Nigerians as part of our global family.

But I also say this as a British citizen, knowing that in our recent colonial past the UK has committed appalling acts of violence. Just over a year ago, I visited the site of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar, India, where a great number of Sikhs – as well as Hindus, Muslims and Christians – were shot dead by British troops in 1919.

I had no status to apologise on behalf of the British government for that atrocity. But I could speak of my shame, sorrow and horror that it happened. And while I absolutely have no place to lecture or rebuke Nigeria, a country that is very dear to my heart, I can say this: learn from our mistakes. Do not go further down the path of violence and injustice. Turn around and find the path of peace, justice and reconciliation.

This is a time for heroes. No nation can be built without heroism. This is a time for all those who play a role in the political and civil leadership of Nigeria to be heroes for the common good. This is a time to sacrifice ambition, to set aside party, to unite to serve in order that Nigerians from richest to poorest may flourish. I am not speaking of a national government, a single non-party approach but of a national determination, agreement and declaration that there will be a common effort for the common good of the nation. I am talking of a willingness to give everything and sacrifice everything, position, place, ideas, wealth, from the highest to the lowest: I appeal for a sacrifice that will raise the nation, bring hope and set a course for prosperity and a glowing future.

This is a time for heroes. We often see heroism as something for battle, for events far away. To build a nation requires a very different heroism. It needs those who say that their personal position must be second to the basic needs of all Nigerians.

I call on Nigerian leaders to come together and agree a common vision that puts aside difference, steers the ship of state away from the rocks of conflict and sets a course that is for the good of all. Democratic politics must continue, the abandonment of democracy would worsen the crisis, but let all involved agree to meet the basic needs of Nigeria.

Those needs are simple. They begin with security. On that foundation can be built food and shelter. Without those two foundations life itself is impossible. They are not privileges of the rich or middle class - although in so many countries that is the tragic reality. They are the entitlement of every human being. Nigeria has the courage to be better than the others.

Built on those two first foundations of need is a third, work. God made human beings to work, in Eden tending the garden. Throughout the Bible, work is not seen as an evil necessity but as part of human dignity. Underemployment and unemployment deny human dignity. Corruption, violence, banditry all pervert the proper purpose of work. In Genesis 1 we are told that God worked and rested. You cannot work without rest but

you cannot rest without work.

Along with work the nation, especially the poor, need healthcare and education. The former expresses our love to neighbour and our obedience to the command of Jesus to tend the sick. The second expresses our trust and hope in the future; we educate so that the next generation may be better. They live out community, express strength through the family, the basic gathering of human beings.

Built on the strong underpinning of these three foundations are the great blessings of science and technology and the whole complexity of society. Electricity, communications, travel, the embracing of diversity are all gifts from God. How gifted is Nigeria! Diverse, brave, intelligent, imaginative – there is little limit to its future. He has poured a wonderful mix of peoples into the nation. In a world where difference from others is too often threat the example of differences being overcome with mutual respect, rich for poor, ethnic group and ethnic group, north and south, Muslim and Christian, such an example will lead the world in the future

For this future to come, heroes are needed today.

The efforts of heroism needed are enormous for everyone from the President to the poorest fisherman, herder or farmer. I have had the privilege of meeting them in all sorts of places around the world, from priests to Prime Ministers, from coal mining Christians under persecution to privileged servants of their peoples. Heroism for Nigeria must come from Nigeria. Foreigners cannot bring it even if they may encourage it. Outsiders cannot create the heroism of reconciliation and peace building although they may support it. It is there – I say again, I cry out with passion, IT IS THERE in Nigeria. I was so moved, to my very heart when I heard of Christian demonstrators stopping to protect Muslims who had stopped to pray. And the other way round. They were heroes, neither compromising faith nor hating the other. Heroism is alive and well in Nigeria. Let elites of government and opposition set it free.

Heroism is required because nation building requires both virtue and resistance.

The virtue is positive action. It was seen in many Nigerians in the run up to liberation from Colonial rule and in other times of great crisis like the civil war. To state “no victors, no vanquished” was extraordinary moral heroism. It is shown by people who set aside their own ambitions to serve their communities. It may be a state Governor who starts building infrastructure like roads or railways that will not be completed while he or she is in office. It serves no short-term electoral purpose but will bless their people for generations who will never even know the Governor’s name.

How many people remember often enough a great hero of Nigeria’s late nineteenth century, Bishop Ajayi Crowther? Coming from slavery he found education, shared the good news of Jesus Christ, campaigned for human dignity, planted churches, schools and clinics, represented indigenous African Christianity to world Anglicanism. Tragically, racism by fellow missionaries displaced him and broke his heart. I hang my head in shame.

The heroic leader is like the good shepherd as we find Jesus describing him in John's gospel (chapter 10:1-5 Luke 15:3-7). The good shepherd cares for the lost, he guards the flock, is courageous in danger, lays down his life when he has to, out of love for those he protects. The sheep are more important than the shepherd for this person. Jesus in John 10 tells us that the hireling, the bad shepherd loves being a shepherd perhaps, yet he does not love the sheep.

The heroic leader sees the long-term vision and always aims for it. Events are dealt with but not allowed to knock the nation off course. President Mandela was not distracted from his vision for South Africa's freedom by more than 25 years harsh imprisonment. Heroes will know that the vision is not for their benefit but for their legacy. The generations 25 years later will be the ones that may rise up and bless them.

The heroic leader knows that he or she is fallible, has feet of clay to some extent. They are self-aware, they know themselves. In consequence they appoint people who compensate for their weaknesses. President Reagan appointed highly gifted people around him and trusted and listened to them. Fools fear clever advisers. Heroes welcome wise and diverse advice. King David, in the rebellion of Absalom, took the advice of Joab (I Kings 19: 1-8). Honour matters to heroes but they are not proud about always being right for they have conquered the fear of letting others have credit or letting others advise.

The heroic leader knows that at the end of all things he or she will go to the grave like everyone else and will face the judgement of God. One of my predecessors as Archbishop, in the 15th century, has a tomb in Canterbury cathedral that has two images of himself. On the top, like the other mediaeval Archbishops, he lies with his fine robes carved in stone, a mitre on his head. Beneath, there is also him, in a simple grave cloth, a person like any other. The heroic leader trusts in God remembering the words of Isaiah; "if you do not stand in faith you will not stand at all". (Isaiah 7:9)

Nation building requires heroes. The wonderful gifted, intelligent, imaginative, dynamic country that is the Federal Republic of Nigeria has a great need of heroes to build itself out of an era of kidnapping, terrorism, and militancy.

I say all this with reluctance and humility, shocked so deeply by the deaths we have seen gripped with a desire for Nigerians of all positions and parties to mourn the losses, to hear the cry of the blood-soaked ground and to build a great democracy for youths and elders, leaders and led.

I do not say this in a patronising, post-colonial way but out of love for the country and its people to whom I owe so much in my journey of faith.

I say this to appeal for security, the feeding of the hungry, the shelter of the homeless. I say this to allow the blood that flowed to become the origins of a new Nigeria.

Amongst Nigerians there are many heroes, in politics, the armed services, the arts and civil society, the professions, the faith leaders, business

and so on, at home and abroad. Some are in Nigeria, some are overseas setting examples of leadership. Let them be recognised, celebrated, imitated.

Amongst the youths and protesters there are many heroes. Please now seek peace and build on what you have achieved at such a high cost. Enter into dialogue, find your heroes who seek the good of every Nigerian. Let freedom and peace flourish. Then your acts will be remembered for the heroism they have shown. In violence there is no future for violence feeds on itself. No person should “cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war”, as Shakespeare wrote in *Anthony and Cleopatra*.

Seize the moment, Nigeria, that those who love you may boast of you. The prize of a greater nation is there, almost within your grasp, greater no longer just in the future, but today.

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