

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN EZEKIEL 18:2b -4 A Response To ‘Blaming The Past Syndrome’ In Nigerian Religious- Political Contexts

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Abstract: The regular statement, ‘they kept us as we are today’ is a dictum on the lips of any average conscious Nigerian in any unpleasant retrospection into the past, from the present situation of the country. This statement lays claim to the fact that some inconsiderable leaders have, in the past, disgruntled the growth of the country and as a result, caused what the country is at the present, suffering. But the accusation would be complete if electorates or better termed, the masses of the present time, are also included in the share of the blames. In so far as some leaders were and are not being credible, one may ask: what are the masses doing in their own great capacity to remedy the horrible situation? If they are the ones to vote-in any leader, haven’t they the capacity of choosing the right leader, irrespective of election manoeuvrings? Are the past politicians the hoodlums on the highways or are these hoodlums the masses? Could it be true that the past politicians are also the lecturers who extort students at schools? Again, could one say that the mistakes of the early missionaries to Nigeria are responsible for many religious aberrations today? Did they teach the churches in Nigeria extortions, false prophecy and hypocrisy? This write-up does not deny the truth that our ugly situation today has a link with the mistakes of our past leaders and masses (i.e. “the parents have eaten sour grapes and children teeth are set on edge” cf. Ezekiel. 18:2b) but tries to state that it is high time we learned from the past occurrences and started being realistic enough to blame ourselves for many great evils befalling us because, we have regularly failed to improve from our past. The dictum ‘they kept us as we are today’ should be a forgone statement in our midst but we should be ever ready to bear the responsibility of our misfortunes. (cf. Ezekiel. 18:3).

This work will analyze the Nigerian situation in the light of the biblical change on the statement, “the parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Thus, it now becomes; “As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel..it is only the person who sins that shall die.”^[1] Therefore, the blame of Nigerian retarded growth should dangle between both the past and the present but especially, to the present.

Keywords: PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, Blaming the Past Syndrome, electorates.

1. BACKGROUND OF THE TEXT

1.1 Ezekiel:

The prophecy of Ezekiel had as its background, the last days of Judah as an independent state. After the death of Josiah, his son Jehoiachim who was regularly accused by Jeremiah of going against the covenant with God came in. In 605, political events brought the Babylonians to power over Judah, and Jehoiachim eventually began his fight for

independence after the weakness of Babylon (after its near defeat by Egypt in 601). In his fight for independence, Jehoiachim misjudged and Jerusalem was taken into captive by Babylon. Jehoiachim later died but they took the new king, Jehoiachin, to exile in Babylon.^[1] Babylon was the locus of the prophecy of Ezekiel.

As the Book of the prophet Ezekiel states, Ezekiel was the son of Buzi. He was among those deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. This means that those deported were not only King Jehoiachin and his entourage but also members of the upper class and of the artisan class (2 Kings 24:10ff)^[1] Ezekiel was part of a group that settled at Tel Abib (Hebrew: "Hill of the ear [of grain]" Babylonian Hill of the flood"). After the banishment of King Jehoiachin (593), the prophet got his call.^[2]

The fact that Ezekiel himself was a priest or at least the son of a priest (1:3) explains not only his interest in the temple and its layout (especially 8; cf. 40ff.) but also the similarity, surprising when compared with the earlier prophets, between his language and that of the priestly document, especially the Law of Holiness (Lev. 17-26)^[1]

1.2 General Overview of the Whole Book:

The Book of Ezekiel is an orderly five-part collection or anthology of writings may be, by the prophet and his followers. Chapters 1-3 narrate the call of the prophet; chapters 4-24 (within which our discussion falls) talk of the prophecies about the fate of Jerusalem before its fall in 587 B.C.E., In chapters 25-32 are contained the prophecies against foreign nations; chapters 33-39 deals on the hope of restoration after the fall of Jerusalem; chapters 40-48 present a vision of the new temple and the restoration of the cultic and political life of the people in the land of Israel.^[1]

Notably, in the composition of the book of Ezekiel, the tripartite division – disaster for the prophet's own people (1-24), for foreign nations (25-32), and salvation (33-48) is maintained with uncommon strictness, although there are some exceptions. The oracles of salvation go with judgment pronouncement.^[1]

2. ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT: EZEKIEL 18:2B - 4

The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel.^[5]

By this portion stated above, the Lord instructed the people of Israel that instead of suffering what their ancestors had done, they would be responsible for their personal deeds. Thus, they should not hand the cause of their blames on their forefathers but on themselves, depending on their deeds. "Some of the more cynical exiles may have repeated this proverb in order to blame others or God (vv. 25, 2; compare 33:17, 20) for their suffering. Ezekiel passionately argues that each generation is responsible for its own actions (vv. 3-20).^[1]

Furthermore, Ezekiel declares that the judgment of God falls only upon the sinner. Thus, the present generation is in no better or worse position before God on account of the sins of the previous generations.^[2] Therefore, for her past sins, God will not destroy Israel but for her present sins. Each generation receives the reward of life or death according to their actions. If the present generation corrects in themselves the mistakes of the past by doing good, God will forgive them and have mercy on them.

Hence, the theme of individual responsibility plays an important role in the thought of Ezekiel. The basic principle is already stated in the Book of Deuteronomy.^[3] Amidst all these, some kind of lose sense of the prophecy is noticed in Exodus 20:5 wherein is stated that the children would bear the consequence of their parents' sins, till the fourth generation, and then love would be shown to the thousandth generation who repents of their sins.^[2]

Antecedents to Ezekiel's Personal Responsibility:

At the time Ezekiel wrote, there was no developed doctrine of an afterlife in Israel. In this time, the justice of God is determined by the expectation that fortune befalls the good or the righteous and misfortune befalls the bad or the wicked. On the contrary and to the wonder of many Israelites, the justice of God was not experienced as they had thought of it, at least in its exact manner. For instance, sometimes, the good will suffer and the wicked, prosper.^[1] From this understanding (that the wicked is favoured, at least at the present), it became the expectation that the punishment for sin would be inflicted on the next generation (since it is not now). This gave birth to our motivating proverb among the people of Israel: the parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge (Ezekiel 18:2; Jeremiah

31:29).^[1] For this, the Israelites see their sufferings, not as a product of any wrongdoing of theirs but of their parents. Thus, they believed that they were not responsible for their sufferings but victims of the wrongs of their ancestors.

The verse under discussion contradicts this above-stated mindset of the people of Israel. Thus, instead of basing the misfortunes of Israelites on their ancestors, it rests on them the responsibility of their own misfortune. He further lays down the various situations in which responsibility is not transferable to anyone (sinful father and righteous son, righteous father and sinful son) and in each case asserts that each person is responsible for his own fate.^[1]

Biblical Understanding of Imputation of Guilt:

Adam enjoyed the original righteousness before his fall. In Adam's fall into the sin of disobedience, man fell also. Thus, Adam is man's representative. By this, anything Adam has either enjoyed or suffered, man enjoyed or suffered. Therefore, man suffers the guilt of the sin of Adam because in Adam, mankind has sinned. This sin of Adam is called the original sin by which he and all men lost their original righteousness and justice. This brought man under the curse of God which saw him out of the Garden of Eden.^[2] Hence, for the fact that mankind is generated outside the Garden of Eden by fallen Adam and Eve, it has lost original justice for original sin. Therefore, in a plain language, the sin of Adam affected man to the extent that man has been suffering the effects of the sin of Adam – death.^[2] The Book of Psalms talks about the sinful nature not caused by man but inherited by man.^[3]

The Old Testament goes to the extent of bequeathing the sins of man on animals. This is exemplified in the Book of Leviticus with the term, scapegoat through which the sins of man are taken away.

When he has finished atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.^[3]

Furthermore, when David committed adultery with Bathsheba and subsequently, murder (of Uriah) and having shown repentance to God through the prophet, Nathan, God skipped him in his punishment plan but laid the brunt on the new born of Bathsheba by taking its life.^[3] The punishment meant for David was shifted to his household.

It is good to understudy some implications of some usages with regard to punishment inheritance. With Exodus 20:5 as a paradigm: "third and fourth generation of those who hate me." This is more likely to be an expression of God's longsuffering^[3]. If one generation hated God (referring here to idolatry), He would rebuke but not destroy the nation. If repentance occurred in a future generation, he would spare the nation. But if three or four generations in a row hated God, He would send the nation into captivity. This explanation again means that the punishment referred to is punishment in this life; and it refers to punishment upon future generations, not as individuals but as a nation. And even then the punishment occurs only if the future generations continue to hate God by practicing idolatry. This is exactly what we see happening in the succeeding generations of the nation of Israel. In any case, once again the passage does not teach that children are born guilty of their parents' sins or that they will be punished in eternity for their parents' sins.

On the other hand v6 shows that God will show mercy on those who love and obey Him. Note that love and obedience always go hand in hand in our service to God (see John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; etc.). So, if future generations would love and obey God, He would show them mercy, not punishment.

Even in the New Testament, sufferings were at times attributed to be the result of the sins of the sufferer's parents. This is portrayed in the healing of the man born blind by Jesus of whom the disciples asked Jesus: whose sins caused the man's condition? Thus, whose sin has he inherited and is suffering the effects!

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's work might be revealed in him."^[1]

Christ: the New Adam/ Baptism and the Effects of Original Sin:

In the new dispensation that saw Christ to the stage, mankind experienced another divine way of imputation. This kind of imputation is no longer that of generations inheriting the sins of their fathers but now generations inheriting the salvation

of Christ through his passion. This goes contrary to the saying of Shakespeare that “the evil men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones”^[1]. Thus, for Shakespeare, the evil is inherited by oncoming generation or lasts unlike the good. A sharp contrast to this is the amendment made by some Nigerians who would always, instead of agreeing with Shakespeare, say: ‘the evil that men do lives with them’. But in the case of Christ, his good is what is inherited and it pushes into extinction the wrong of Adam.

Christ is the new Adam who came to right the wrong of Adam. Thus, from Adam, man inherited the guilt of the original sin but from Christ, mankind receives acquittal from the original sin through the sacrament of Baptism. By baptism, we are washed clean of the original sin that makes us share in the sin we committed in Adam; and are brought into new life in Christ; a life in which we are rewarded as individuals who are responsible for their own actions and whose personal actions contribute to their salvation wrought by Christ. At baptism, the name of the individual to be baptised is called specifically. This could be an indication of Christ’s salvation per head and personal responsibility over ones action.

The two principal effects of baptism are purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit.^[2] By baptism, all sins are forgiven, original sin and personal sins, as well as all punishments for sin. Thus, anyone who has undergone this kind of rebirth by baptism has nothing to impede him from entering the kingdom of God^[3] Amidst all these purification, the sacrament of baptism leaves the imprint of some effects of original sin in man. Thus:

Yet certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptised, such as suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character, and so on, as well as an inclination to sin that Tradition calls *concupiscence*, or metaphorically, “the tinder for sin” (*fomes peccati*); since concupiscence “is left for us to wrestle with, it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ.”^[4]

Christ came to relief us of the entanglement Adam’s sin has on man. As the sin of Adam affected all, the redemption of Christ also affected all especially, who are baptised in him. The latter paragraphs demonstrate the redemption Christ brought for us and at the same time does not deny the effects of the sin of Adam on man.

God created us for a life of grace, however we sin. Original sin is not a sin we commit, it is a state we inherit. Baptism erases original sin, but being human, we are still prone to sin.^[5] So, even though man inherits the sin of Adam, he remains responsible for his personal conscious actions.

When we say babies are born with original sin, we are not saying they have committed sin. But we know they are born into a human state that will be tempted. The inclination to commit sin is not itself a sin, sin is something freely chosen. Baptism offers us the grace of Christ to choose what is right and resist the temptation to sin. Baptism is a way of not only washing away original sin, but bringing us all the graces to resist temptation. St. Paul said sin entered the world through one man, Adam, and we now share in that solidarity of sin. Paul believed that God created us to live forever. Death was not part of the original plan. Sin introduced death into the picture, and now all humans share solidarity of death too.

There is something in common between Jesus and Adam. They both affected the entire human race. But that is where the similarity ends. Adam's action through temptation brought sin. Jesus' brings us redemption. St. Paul says: If, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. Through Adam all have died and through Christ all have life. (Romans 5:12) "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin."^[6]

Ezekiel 18: 2b–4 in Nigerian Religious-Political Contexts:

a) *In the Religious Context:*

Religiously, every average Nigerian is superstitious. This superstition is evident in almost all he or she does. Once he or she is encapsulated in the web of superstition, he or she believes that other power is too overwhelming to the extent of manipulating or even destroying his or her life. For instance, one in this kind of condition would strike his foot against a stone twice and would immediately conclude that his enemies are at work. Thus, instead of removing the stone, he would start rebooking the *innocent* stone and after which would seek for clarifications from the native doctor who always affirms to the feelings of his client just to make good gains.

It is not usually a different case when he or she sleeps in the church building for half of the day’s hours and yet expects himself to be as rich as his hustling counterparts. When this does not happen the way he wants it, he may then settle for the prophecy given him by one charlatan in the name of a *man of God* who would blame everything on ancestral curses

and then suggest *family liberation* or *healing the family root* during which the victim spends and even borrows more than he has in order to pay the so called healer or prophet. The pastor would blame every malediction on the ancestors and none on his client.

One of the most contradicting types of this madness of apportioning blames to the past would be the case of some women who are certain that they have no womb but would be hoping for conception *by fire by force*. By this, this work is not trying to put a doubt on the omnipotence of God but on the omnipotence of nature. Any clown may try to convince her that her womb is still in its proper position; that it was taken away by an enemy but that *God* would restore it. By exclaiming *Amen*, the hypnotizer can be sure of his victory over his client. He would then expect his own huge financial returns.

All these make prophesy in some independent churches, a very lucrative venture though the reason for the upsurge of independent churches could be as a result of racism, cultural patriotism, socio-political and even economic. The schismatic bodies among them are found in the protestant and Catholic churches.

This massive proliferation is figuratively speaking only the top of the iceberg – hundreds more of such indigenous movements of renewal or protest remain in embryo inside the historical churches at varying depths without the disaffection they represent having as yet broken surface in schism. The schismatic bodies are therefore only a part of a much larger movement of dissidence, the bulk of which still remains in amorphous form within the protestant and Catholic Churches.^[1]

The ravaging upsurge of false prophecy in Nigeria precisely, and its effects which is not usually for the good of the society, has put some Christians to fright. Thus, “to ordinary Christians it seems that, ‘the end is approaching; the scriptural prophecies concerning the end of the world are gradually being accomplished; the appearance of ‘false prophets’.”^[2]

Christianity in Nigeria or Africa as a whole has been so wounded by *blaming the past syndrome* to the extent that prophecy is viewed through the spectacle of *accusation of the past* (while remaining blameless) and *ambiguous promise of a heavenly future on earth*. The client is constantly told to reject his ugly situation as not being his/her portion. Once a ‘prophet’ is able to do this, he would be smiling to the bank always. What a depraved worldview! All these are done just for the client to be responsible for only the good and never for the bad. Every misfortune is blamed on the past. This section does not exonerate completely the past from any kind of influence on the present (as we have shown with the effects of the original sin even after baptism) but is against pushing every blame of today to the past thereby seeing ourselves as innocent or as with lesser guilt.

It is worthy of note that these religious malpractices discussed in this work is either caused by the gullibility of the Christian or his avoidance of blame. On the part of the false prophets, they are engendered by search for self-worth and acquisition of wealth. Those prophesying for money are surely held to be false prophets, since their motives are not spiritual. These are interpreters of dreams, witch-hunters (hunting for other persons in the past or present apart from themselves), fortune-tellers, who predict prosperity in business to please their desperate clients.^[3]

The general belief in the efficacy of prayers has been the undoing of many innocent and honest but weak-willed citizens, who earn their pay the hard way. Very unfortunate incidents in their life have driven them to all sorts of extremes, and these have been the spring-boards of many of these preachers.^[4]

Many educated Nigerian Christians (especially clerics) are presently tilting towards cultural patriotism. By this, they propose the movement of inculturation as a veritable means of transmitting the Gospel in Africa. Many of them cannot talk about inculturation without criticizing ruthlessly, the early missionaries whom they consider the root cause of syncretism in Christianity. For them, if the early missionaries were to understand the richness of the African cultures, they would not have used the method of imposition of faith on Africans in their evangelization. For instance, the first missionaries who came to Nigeria used the strategy of mass conversion of the Benin Kingdom. This missionary approach failed to win converts to the faith to the extent that was envisaged.^[1]

Among other reasons, the priests were more representative of the political authority of the King of Portugal than of the Catholic Church. They were ignorant of the religious customs of the Bini, which they labeled as the worship of the devil (diabolism)....^[2]

Another blame leveled on the early missionaries to Nigeria is that they did not believe that Africans knew God even before their coming. This could be one of the past mistakes on which some hold as the cause of fanaticism noticed in the current Christianity in Nigeria whereby some groups regard everything cultural in Nigeria as not depicting any vestige of the presence of God in our culture. Chigere presented this wrong conception of the early missionaries about God in the Nigerian culture, using Igbo culture as a paradigm.

Previous to 1885, report had seeped into Propaganda Fide in Rome concerning populous ethnic which inhabited both banks and mighty River Niger and *know no God*. These reports received clarification through the initiative and enthusiasm of a young Holy Ghost missionary named Father Leon Lejeune... Propaganda invited the Holy Ghost Fathers to take the evangelization of the Lower tribes.^[3]

Still in defense of the existence of God almighty in Nigeria, especially in Igbo culture, Chinua Achebe had in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, demonstrated the error of the early missionaries in the conversation between Akunna and Mr. Brown.

You say that there is one supreme God who made heaven and earth...we also believe in Him and call Him Chukwu. He made all the world and the other gods...Our fathers knew that Chukwu was the overlord and that is why many of them gave their children the name Chukwuka – “Chukwu is Supreme.”^[4]

This write-up does not deny any pejorative influence from the early missionaries on the present Christians but speaks against blaming them totally for our present day shortcomings. What we should be always asking ourselves is; if the past did not do well, what have I done to remedy the situation? What have these theologians done about the present denial of the Christian God in African religion prior to the coming of the white missionaries, apart from blaming the past for everything?

b) In the Political Context:

It has been the *a la mode* that the present era blames the past era for its mistakes. The same thing is experienced in the speeches that fall out of the mouths of many present leaders. Very few of them would acknowledge the good things engineered by the past government but would always laden some blames on the past administration. In the same vein, Nigerians blame the colonial masters for their misfortunes. In line with this, Ukaegbu notes that,

Colonialism is also fingered as the root cause of the ethnic crisis in Nigeria. It was an illusion fostered by Western propaganda and nourished by selfish African elites that the bigger the size and population of a country the more highly rated such a country is in the comity of nations. Thus, colonial rulers lumped together for their administrative convenience ethnic groups that are not compatible, that has no history of mutual aid or support or strong economic and political relationships. The resultant effect of this is endless conflict^[5].

This view was supported by Matthew Kukah who wrote that the European's arbitrary state arrangement accounts for the endless debate, conflicts and bloodshed about internal and international borders which have now become a major source of instability.^[6] Ejeziem supports this by stating that before the colonization of Nigeria, she had existed as an aggregate of autonomous ethnic kingdoms with their different leaders and tested ways of life: the Fulani and Yoruba empire of Oyo, the Ife and Benin Kingdoms, the politically decentralized but culturally homogeneous Igbos of the Eastern Region, the City States of Delta Region as well as other minority groups.^[1]

A harsher statement on this is found in the Wisdom Satellite Magazine wherein Boniface Anusiem stated the counterproductive outcome of amalgamation on Nigeria.

Such a unification of people of diverse socio-cultural, political and religious orientations was not only unnatural, but soon became the pregnant mother of various vices under the appearance of bigotry, bickering, unimagined conflicts and even warfare.^[2]

This work does not deny all these statements illustrated above against colonialism on Nigeria. But it is against the insistence by some Nigerians, that our problems today are caused solely by colonialism and therefore that we have no blame apportioned to us, the present generation. Then, we should ask ourselves: if the colonial masters joined these *discordant* ethnic groups together, did they also force them not to seek for some ways of bettering their situations? For example, did they prevent them from applying confederation as a system of government in Nigeria, if secession cannot serve better? Did they compel politicians to steal the country dry and then use it to erect factories and companies in the lands of the colonial masters still, thereby depriving their people of every good and taking them to those who do not need them? To be blunt, did they teach us to be so insensitive and inhuman to the extent that we fan egotism thereby dehumanizing our fellow Nigerians?

Furthermore, some political analysts would trace the origin of non-regard for made-in-Nigeria products to the imperialism of Europeans on Africa. By this, the Europe are believed to have dominated Africa and made her always feel inferior before them and anything from them. They spread the idea that Africans live on trees and have no mind, through text books and other forms of media. The most dangerous aspect of the issue is that many Africans have come to believe in all these by accepting their *inferiority complex* as they grow, preferring anything white as original and anything black as ugly. This belief can be made evident in the act of bleaching the skin to be yellowish instead of remaining as nature kept them.

Even though some vestiges of the maladministration of the colonial masters have caused Nigerians great wounds but the wounds I would say, are not incurable. It takes a patient to approach the doctor for healing and then for the doctor to start the treatment. All these are the antecedences before the patient is healed of his wounds. The sick country, Nigeria, has always relapsed on her old wounds and has refused to use even her best brains to salvage her deplorable situation. But she keeps blaming the past for her present as the future would also blame the present for its failures. This is a clear demonstration of laziness and utmost relapse!

One ironical thought Nigerians have at times is the thought that when we talk of the past leaders, that they have clearly quitted their former offices. Lamentably, those *Heroes past* (so called) are still the present rulers in Nigeria. If not them, their children or relations to whom they have bequeathed their contagious and dislocated ideas. The situation is so pathetic that when a leader in Nigeria criticizes the former leader (s) he is invariably criticizing himself and family. Here one runs into the confusion of knowing what 'the past leaders' really implies if not 'the present leaders'.

At times also, we hear people blame the Civil war for all the malfunctioning in the country. Many a time, to be more particularistic, some say: if not for Ojukwu's stubbornness and Gowon's craftiness, Nigeria would have been better. Some tribalistic ones would sectionalize their blames by saying: 'the Igbo have spoilt this nation with their greed' or 'the Hausa has spoilt this nation with their love for killing'. Some never fail to point accusing fingers at Kaduna Nzeogwu (and other generals) for engineering the war with their failed coup.

All these point towards pre-civil war, the civil war and post-civil war experiences. Some average Nigerians can hold a four-hour discussion in a bar, blaming on the civil war the Nigerian current situation instead of knowing what to do about the situation. Some house wives may be busy telling about how their husbands could have been a very rich man if not for the war. As they tell this, they remain house wives, unproductive and doing practically nothing to remedy the condition of their families. A student who managed to hear about the war would lay his blame on the war (for his stunted academic growth) which he would claim scattered the quality education the missionaries bequeathed to the country. All these result in the fear of entering into oneself and hearing the truth that comes therefrom.

Synthesis with Illustration:

This research work tries to give meaning to the prophecy of Ezekiel in the Nigerian religious-political context. Therefore, it tries to apply the statement of Ezekiel "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel"^[1] to solving the problem of apportioning blame only on the past while exonerating the present time. Thus, the ground of this prophecy is rooted in the popular axiom that no longer shall it be said that 'the evil men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones'^[2] but that 'the evil men do live with them'.

Therefore, *a dog cannot eat the human excrement and the teeth of the goat get rotten* but the teeth of the dog are the ones to suffer the effects of eating excrement. Talking about the effects dog's action may have on the goat as a mammal, this act can have a serious effect in the approach people have for four-legged animals which may result in the faulty logic of overgeneralization: thus, *if dog, a four legged animal, eats human excrement, and the goat is a four- legged animal also; therefore, all mammals (including goats) eat excrement*. This is to demonstrate that one can suffer the effects of another's action even though he may be innocent. These effects do not affirm that the antecedence is solely responsible for the subsequent result (false conclusion on all mammals) but that it has just influenced its identity. Coming from another angle, assuming the teeth of the goat are really rotten, does it mean that the dog is responsible for that? Thus, basing the rottenness of the goat's teeth on the dogs action would not be so adequate but blaming the goat who must have done something to cause the rot of its teeth (which must not be necessarily as a result of the dog eating excrement).

Based on this illustration, this work does not deny that the present can suffer some effects of past actions but should not blame totally the past, acquitting and beatifying the present. In so far as the past might have affected the present, by the virtue of personal responsibility taught by our text on discourse, the present bears the responsibility of its own actions. We are responsible for either our success or our failure.

3. CONCLUSION

Blame: from the Perspective of Christ:

Jesus Christ teaches us the right way of apportioning blames. Judging from the narrations of his passion and death, from the human understanding, it was obvious that his killers should be blamed for his death. His killers affirmed the full consciousness of their action by their words: “His blood be on us and on our children”^[1] even after Pilate had declared his innocence of Christ’s crucifixion. But amidst this show of willed condemnation, Christ acquitted them of their guilt.

From the cross Christ tells “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” Of course they knew what they were doing: that they were crucifying a man, that he was suffering intense pain and that he would die in a short while. But did they know fully what they were doing? Did they know that Christ was the one they were expecting, one who was their saviour...? ^[2]

Christ always goes beyond man’s capacity of understanding situations. In human understanding, the offenders of Christ had proved beyond any doubt that they willed their actions but Christ went ahead to forgive them, removing the blame actually on them and at the same, excusing them on the platform of ignorance. This is a great lesson to humanity, always disposed of blaming even those who should not be blamed and at the same time, blaming those really guilty of any ill. With the Christian heart taught us by Christ, we should not be so tied up to even blaming those who appear to have done wrong to us in the past, for our present problems. Viewing them through the mirror of Christian love, we can put them in the situation of St. Paul who understands what he does and agrees with the law but does not know what drives him to doing evil. This could be as a result of lack of inner freedom; the lack that could have compelled the protagonists of the past to err.

I do understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.^[3]

The action of Christ and the situation of St. Paul should be our guiding principles as Christians to forgive others of their faults and at the same time, not spending so much time blaming the past for the present. Christ avoided blaming the past (his offenders, even though he was suffering some effects of their wickedness) for his miserable state of passion and subsequent death but rather forgave them. This could have been because they never knew that Christ was the messiah they had been anticipating for ages. The lack of inner freedom caused by the sin in them may have blinded their hearts, making them believe that Christ was a troublemaker who was out to destroy their society and established order.^[4] Going by this also, Christ may have understood them to be in the same inner compulsion to do evil, suffered by St. Paul. All these point towards forgiving the past and learning from it.

Acknowledging the forgiveness is not as easy as it appears, Pope Saint John Paul II noted that, Yes! It is not easy to forgive, but it is urgent and necessary for the good of all. It is true that one cannot erase from memory what happened in the past, but hearts can and must be freed from bearing grudges and planning revenge. The memory of (past) errors and injustices should be a strong lesson not to let either happen again, so as to avoid new and perhaps even greater tragedies.^[5]

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