

Political Pursuit of Unity: A Narrative Inquiry into the Davidic Reign and its Typology in the Oyo Empire

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ABSTRACT

This is a contextual-biblical study on how political leaders can effectively pursue national unity amid diversity. Psalm 133 is one of the remarkable biblical texts on unity, it, therefore, becomes a major standpoint in this study. First, the study draws a connection between Psalm 133 and David's reign, otherwise called Davidic unity reign. Second, it examines the unification strategy in the Oyo Empire and highlights its similarity in comparison with the Davidic unity reign. The methodology used in the study is narrative inquiry. It investigates the life of David in connection to Psalm 133 bringing out the relevant narrative behind the psalm. It also inquires about the historical narrative of the Oyo Empire with the aim of uncovering the political practices that were geared towards the unity of the empire. All the information in the study was gleaned from existing literature. Based on biographical, historical, and comparative analysis, it is evident that both King David's Israel and Alaafin's Oyo Empire have the worship of a divine being as their tool of unity. The major antithesis is that while Yahweh, the universal God, *used* David to unite all the tribes of Israel through worship, Alaafin *used* Sango, a tribal god, to unify all the people under his ruler-ship.

Keywords: *Alaafin, Davidic reign, ethnicity, Oyo Empire, politics, Sango, unity*

I. INTRODUCTION

On the one hand, this paper is about the theme of unity in Psalm 133. It claims that Psalm 133 is an expression of the writer's wonder at the sight of the unity he saw as the people of God ascended to Jerusalem. As such he relates unity with two symbols of worship – Aaron and Mount Zion (Jerusalem). The unity he describes in the psalm has something to do with David. God *used* David to unite all the tribes of Israel during his reign, through worship – the unity towards which the writer of Psalm 133 expresses his wonder. On the other hand, this paper is about the story of the Oyo Empire (not referring to the present Oyo Kingdom but the Old Oyo Empire that fell in the mid-nineteenth century), which also comprised diverse people groups. The story of the Oyo Empire reflects a similarity to what David did to unite the tribes of Israel – worship. But in this case, the Alaafin, individual successive political leaders of the empire, *used* Sango, the god of thunder, as the agent of worship.

Humanity, in all political history, has always looked for means of uniting people amid ethnic diversity. In present-day Africa, national oneness is being pursued through ethnicity-conscious political alliances. In the Oyo Empire, it was pursued through Sango worship. Considering the biblical narrative reflected in Psalm 133 and the Oyo Empire, what lesson do we have for political leaders in their quest for national unity? Political leaders will only succeed in uniting people when God is the one *using* them as His instrument to promote His universal values, other than them *using* His influence as an instrument to retain power.

As they lead nations and organizations that are comprised of diverse peoples, leaders from all walks of life grapple with methods of uniting their constituencies in their diversity. As scholars alike grapple with the issue of unity in diversity, different theories have been postulated. In his own reflection, Duncan Green stresses the role of leaders and leadership in driving change. He notes that leaders can drive change when they “align the iron filings...replacing the natural tendency of organizations to fragment into competing groups with a shared purpose and passion and building up alliances and coalitions for change” (Green, 2016). With this Green emphasizes the use of shared purpose and passion in bringing people together. He argues that leaders play a crucial role in uniting diverse nations by addressing ethnic tensions, promoting inclusivity, and fostering a sense of collective identity.

Also, Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum hold that understanding how political parties operate and interact within a diverse nation is essential for promoting unity and cooperation (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2020). With this claim, their emphasis is on cutting along the grain of the operations of the political parties in a country. According to Sarah Dryden-Peterson and Bethany Mulimbi, education plays a vital role in disrupting threats of conflict in ethnically diverse nations. Their presentation of the historical analysis of Botswana shows that education can serve as a powerful tool to bridge divides, promote understanding, and foster a sense of shared citizenship (Dryden-Peterson and Mulimbi, 2017).

One weakness of the models highlighted above is how they all seem to stand in isolation. One needs to find a way of applying each of them so that they all work together as a system. This is to say that the pursuit of national unity should not just be about shared purpose and passion alone; it should not just be about understanding the operation of political parties of a nation alone; it should not just be about education alone.

It should be about a system where all of these are built together to work synchronously. It is common knowledge that Africans are religious. Religion, demonstrated in their spirituality and acts of worship, permeates into every aspect of their daily affairs. It is on this note that this paper holds that spiritual act of worship is a viable way to tie together all the practices or models of the national pursuit of unity.

Ethnic loyalty, or the strong attachment and allegiance to one's ethnic group, has been a significant factor in shaping political dynamics in several African countries. The most notorious example of extreme ethnic loyalty and its consequences can be seen in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups resulted in the mass killing of approximately 800,000 people, mostly Tutsis. This tragic event demonstrates the destructive consequences of ethnic loyalty when it escalates into violence and discrimination (McDoom, 2021).

Nigeria is another example. Nigeria is a multiethnic country with over 250 ethnic groups. Ethnic loyalty has played a significant role in the country's politics, often leading to social divisions and conflicts. The Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), fought primarily along ethnic lines, resulted in the loss of millions of lives and deepened ethnic tensions (Daly, 2020). Ethnic loyalty has also been a prominent feature of Kenyan politics. The 2007-2008 post-election violence, triggered by allegations of electoral fraud, resulted in over 1,000 deaths and displaced thousands of people. The conflict largely pitted the Kikuyu ethnic group, which supported President Mwai Kibaki, against other ethnic groups (Klaus, 2022).

Several African leaders have made attempts to unify their diverse nations. Taking an example of Kenya at its early stage of independence, the word *harambe* was popular in the days of Jomo Kenyatta. It was Kenyatta's way of calling all the tribes of Kenya to "all pull together" as the meaning of the word implies. This is also the idea behind the *Nyayo* philosophy as proposed by Daniel Moi (Moi, 1986). Yet, in today's Kenya, ethnic loyalty is so prominent that it determines the political alliance formation in the country. For example, the formation of *Azimio la Umoja* and *Kenya Kwanza* in the last national election was based on no other reason than the politicians' awareness of ethnic loyalty. Many Kenyans are noted to have the tendency to vote for politicians from their ethnic community. And for this reason, Kenyan political alliances are made taking this into consideration.

Also, at the end of the Nigerian Civil War, the national government instituted national unity programs, one of which was the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Still, in today's Nigeria, there is an agitation for ethnic independence, one of which is made by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), as evident on the pages of Nigerian dailies. Also, like it is in Kenya, all Nigerian politicians at the national level must learn to play the game of ethnicity-conscious political alliance. But the question is, will such a political alliance bring authentic unity to the country? The truth of the matter is that if one's reason for casting their vote for a political aspirant is based on ethnic relations, it is an indication that their ethnicity is placed before their nation, which may also imply that their ethnic interest surpasses national interest in all other matters pertaining to the national government. If this is truly the case, then ethnicity-conscious political alliances are not the viable way to go in pursuit of true national unity. The main objective of this study is to provide a contextual-biblical recommendation for African political leadership amid ethnic diversity.

Specifically, it aims to discuss the allusion to Davidic unity reign in Psalm 133 and narrate the historical means of pursuing unity in the Oyo Empire. Further we shall highlight the typology and antithesis of the Davidic unity reign in the Yoruba Oyo Empire with an application to the African political context.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is a contextual-biblical study on how political leaders can effectively pursue national unity amid diversity. The methodology used is narrative inquiry. According to Merriam and Tisdell, “Narrative inquiry makes use of various methodological approaches to analyzing stories” (2016). Since narrative inquiry makes use of various approaches to analyze stories, the approaches in this study are biographical, historical, and comparative.

The two objects of this study are Psalm 133 and the Oyo Kingdom’s traditional political practices. Although Psalm 133 is written in poetic genres, it mentions real places, people, and events, all of which have significant stories behind them. Therefore, the study did a narrative inquiry of the names and phrases that appear within the text and superscript of the Psalm. Specifically, it explores the narratives behind the phrases, “song of ascent” and “of David” as they appear in the superscript of the Psalm. All narratives were collected from biblical accounts and writings of biblical commentators.

Narratives about the Oyo Empire were gathered from existing literature by looking into the religious and political practices of the empire. Having gleaned the narratives regarding the reign of David and the Oyo Empire the study uses a comparative approach to draw its conclusion. The Davidic reign is regarded as the ideal political setting, while the study into the Oyo Kingdom searches for the mirrored practices in the ideal political setting, which is the Davidic reign.

III. RESULTS

Theme of Unity in Psalm 133 and Its Relationship with the Davidic Reign

The superscript of Psalm 133 indicates that the psalm is “A song of ascents” and also “Of David”.¹ It is important to note that Bible translators find the superscript difficult to translate (Crow, 1996). But it is not only Psalm 133 that poses this difficulty, all the psalms that bear this superscript also do. Therefore, “with few exceptions, the meaning of the superscript has dominated the discussion of [the] psalms” that bear this superscript (Crow, 1996).

Despite the slight difference in the translation of this superscript, most translators translated it using the same words. Most versions – such as NIV, New American Standard Bible, Amplified Bible, English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, and NKJV – translate the superscript as “A song of ascents. Of (By) David”. This study shall consider the interpretation of this superscript according to this majority rendition.

¹ Except otherwise stated, all the scriptural texts quoted in this paper are from New International Version, 1984 edition.

Psalm 133 is a “song of ascent”. According to McLarney, the three occasions that may warrant the people of Israel to sing the psalm are speculated to be: (1) when people are going up to Jerusalem for the designated festivals; (2) one of the songs the Israelites remnant sang when they were returning to their homeland after exile; (3) one of the psalms sung by the Levites as they approach the Temple (McLarney, 2014). On the other hand, Kidner is of the opinion that the psalm “*marked the moment (David) had waited for, when at last all Israel had rallied to him, and God had now given him Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:1 – 10)*” (Kidner, 1975). This is therefore to indicate that in any case, the Psalm has something to do with the city of Jerusalem; and more especially that it is evident in the psalm that it is a reflection on an occasion when “*Brothers live together in unity*” (v. 1).

The authorship of Psalm 133 is debated. Many writers claim David’s authorship of the psalm and all the psalms that bear his name. Others believe it was only an allusion to the time of his reign (Longman & Dillard, 2006). Meanwhile, whatever position writers hold about the role of David in Psalm 133, it is clear that it has something to do with him (Maclaren, 2007).

In its overall outlook, the psalm portrays the beauty and benefit of unity among God’s people. Unity is a “good” and “pleasant” thing (v 1). The writer uses two images to depict the pleasantness of unity: precious oil upon Aaron (v 2) and the dew of Hermon falling upon Mount Zion (v 3). The image of Aaron brings to our attention what Aaron represented in his days – priesthood, a human figure who spearheaded the worship of Yahweh. The mention of Mount Zion (Jerusalem) brings to our attention the image of a geographical location where the worship of Yahweh took place, starting from the days of David onward. Since the two analogies used to paint the picture of unity have to do with worship, we therefore infer that unity among the people of God has to do with worship. There is something about worship that relates it to unity.

Worship of Yahweh as the Israelites’ Unifying Factor

Judges gives a vivid picture of the state of anarchy in the land of Israel after the Israelites settled in Canaan. People lived in tribal communities and “*everyone did as he saw fit*” (Judges 21:25b). The only times we see the people of Israel coming together for a common cause (in the book of Judges) are usually when there are external threats. In the absence of threats from foreign political powers, “*Israel/Canaan’s governments had always been local or, at best, regional and reactive. Israel’s constituent elements, what we casually refer to as tribes, were never completely united. Only in times of external threat did smaller conglomerates elect temporary war leaders whom we know as the judges*” (Rosenbaum, 2002).

Describing the extent of disunity in the nation of Israel, Rosenbaum strongly argues that the nation was perpetually disunited. In his words, he notes: “*On the Israel popular level, however, the various parts of the kingdom were never very close. In 931 BCE that situation was notarized by their formal separation.... The family relationships among tribes claimed by the Bible are largely spurious.... They seem to have stopped fighting among themselves only when presented by the outside threats, and not always even then. The notion of essential Israelite unity is inferred from such depictions as royal marriages between the two ruling houses, joint commercial or military ventures, and the commission of Amos, held to be a poor, shepherd Southerner, but able to command an audience in the North*” (Rosenbaum, 2002).

Meanwhile, in his comment on Psalm 133, Wilcock points out, “*As a nation, Israel was most united when people of every tribe converged in Jerusalem for the great festivals. At the first Passover of Hezekiah’s reign, a royal appeal brought worshippers there even from what was left of the breakaway northern kingdom*” (Wilcock, 2001). The Passover that was celebrated during the reign of Josiah brought people together across the nations of Judah and Israel (2 Chronicles 35:18). The insight we draw from this is that, in Israel, the national worship of Yahweh is related to national unity. Therefore, the kings who put the worship of Yahweh at the top of their agenda usually succeeded in bringing people together. The worship of Yahweh usually caused people from all Israelite tribes to ascend the mountain of God in Jerusalem and renew their commitment to Him. The writer of Psalm 133 expresses his wonder at the sight of such an event when the Israelites made a pilgrimage.

We noted earlier how Kings Hezekiah and Josiah brought the tribes of Israel together. In comparison to David, the two kings only had a momentary experience of bringing all the tribes of Israel together, while the entire Davidic reign is known for national unity that spilled over to the time of his successor, King Solomon. Amid Israel’s national disunity, 1 Chronicles 12:23 – 40 gives us a hint that David earned unusual cooperation from people of all tribes in Israel. In this passage, we see the nature of the national coalition that culminated in David’s coronation. The writer of 1 Chronicles seemed to be surprised that when the time came for David to become king, “*In fact, everyone in Israel agreed that David should be their king*” (12:38b, NLT).

Another scene that gave us an understanding that Davidic reign was marked by unity (cooperation from all Israelite tribes) is when he brought back the Ark of Covenant. The stories of 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 15 – 16 give us the impressive outlook of the Assembly of God’s people from “*the whole house of Israel*” (2 Sam 6:5; see also vv 1, 15 and 19) when the Ark was brought to Jerusalem during the time of David.

David’s success in earning the cooperation of all the tribes of Israel is also seen in the scene in which he was received back after being away in exile caused by his son Absalom (1 Sam 19:40 – 43). Although the scene ended in the temporal breakaway of the “*house of Israel*”, nevertheless it was clear that all the tribes were eagerly present to receive the king back. The temporal breakaway was a result of what happened when David stopped doing what He did in the first place to unite the people (2 Sam 12:8 – 9). In any case, one remarkable thing about the reign of David is that he earned the cooperation of all the tribes of Israel. Therefore, it is no wonder that his reign is proudly reputable as the “*Golden Age*,” marked by incredible national prosperity, which is a product of national unity.

One thing that sets Davidic unity reign apart from the reigns of all other kings of Israel and Judah is the habitual worship of Yahweh both personally for David and nationally as he influenced the nation to do so. This habitual worship of Yahweh is reflected in David’s establishment of Jerusalem as the capital city, which the writer of Psalm 48 describes as “*the city of our God, His holy mountain*” (v. 1). David’s chosen capital city was also known as the mountain of God upon which His people make their pilgrimage as they sing the song of ascent, whose scenario the writer of Psalm 133 romanticized.

Upon the conquest of Jerusalem David sought and brought back the Ark of the Covenant, “*now making his capital also the central sanctuary of Yahwistic covenant faith*” (Birch, 2005). David did not only bring the Ark to Jerusalem, but he also desired to build a house for it, the house that was later built by Solomon and became the temple of God, towards which all Israel is expected to make their supplications (2 Chron 6: 29). The height of David’s commitment to personal and national habitual worship of Yahweh happened when he began the preparation for the temple (1 Chronicles 22). Having made material provisions for the temple, David went as far as creating a Levitical and priestly organization for temple worship (1 Chronicles 23 – 26).

Because David plays a significant role in the institution of the Yahweh worship, which is the reason for people’s ascent to Zion, this gives a strong basis to argue that Psalm 133, with its theme of unity, has a significant connection to the Davidic reign. Although the writer uses worship-related images as analogies of unity, an examination of the Davidic reign proves that worship is not just an analogy of unity, it is the determinant of Israel’s national unity.

In a non-biblical kingdom that was comprised of diverse people, the Oyo Empire, we observe something like what David did as an attempt to unify all the tribes of his kingdom. The next section of this article explores the typology of Davidic unity reign in the Oyo Kingdom.

Alaafin and the Unification Strategy of the Oyo Empire

Our focus in this section will be on how the office of Alaafin (the traditional ruler of the Oyo Empire) ensures unity within the Oyo Empire. The Oyo Empire was an empire within the Yoruba race. The Yoruba race is found in West Africa but is largely populated in Nigeria. Its founding was attributed to Oranmiyan. He is a prince of Oduduwa, who is the progenitor and the first king of the whole Yoruba race. According to tradition, all the children of Oduduwa (or grandchildren as some traditions hold) grew to become kings who established their own kingdoms. Some of them are Onipopo, (the king of Popo) and Onisabe (the king of Sabe).

Oranmiyan as one of Oduduwa’s children established the Oyo Kingdom. Both Oranmiyan, the first king of Oyo, and the succeeding kings, who are known to be Oranmiyan’s direct descendants, are called Alaafin. As such, “*Alaafin*” as used in this study refers to the title for the kings of Oyo, other than referring to an individual political figure.

Ile Ife is traditionally believed to be the origin of all the Yoruba people. However, some scholars hold that Oyo remains the political headquarters of the race. Although there are arguments as to which of the two ancient cities (Oyo and Ile Ife) has a more supreme place in Yoruba history and politics, there is minimum doubt about the vastness and power attributed to the Oyo Kingdom. In fact, so vast is this kingdom that it attained the status of an empire, which is reputable to be one of the greatest empires in West Africa (Agiri, 1971; Otunola, 2021).

In its initial stages, the Oyo Empire was confined to Oyo Ile (Eyeo, which is otherwise called Old Oyo). But as time went by the kingdom acquired enormous military power, which enabled it to expand its territory. At this time when Oranmiyan's descendants were at the height of their military prowess in the eighteenth century, "*they spread from Eyeo (Old Oyo) to as far as Ketu, Idassa, Shabe and Kilibo and beyond into Dahomey and Togoland; to as far as the banks of the Niger; and their influence reached as far east as Benin*" (Ojo, 1971). According to Akingbogun, "*Oyo controlled the whole of the coastline from Whydah to Lagos in the 18th century*" (1966).

Parrinder's account, as quoted by Ojo, provides a more vivid picture of the vastness of the Oyo Empire, it extends from Puka on the South, which is within five miles of the sea, to Lagos and Whydah in that line, to the north about 10th degree of north latitude. It is surrounded by Dahomey to the north-west, which is reckoned a tributary province: Ketto and Maha countries on the north, Borgoo on the north-east, five days distant; Jaboo to the south and west. Its tributaries are Dahomey, Alladah, Badagry and Maha (Ojo, 1971).

Looking at the vastness of this empire it can be said to be the approximate size of present-day Sierra Leone and Gambia. One notable thing that gave the Oyo Empire the resemblance to both ancient Israel and contemporary Africa is "*the diverse entities under its control which made it difficult to govern*" (Otunola, 2021). Some of the people groups under the colonial power of the empire were either non-Yoruba or non-Oyo people, some of them being kingdoms in their own rights. As of the 18th century, there were 13 larger kingdoms within the empire, not to mention the minor ones (Akinjogbin, 1966). Meanwhile, most of the kingdoms under the Oyo Empire were comprised of people with their own kings and slightly different dialects from Oyo Yoruba. How then was Alaafin able to unite all the peoples of the Oyo Empire in their diversity?

One obvious way by which the empire was held together was through its military forces. But beyond the forces of Oyo military might that tied the empire together, more prominent was the place of Sango worship in ensuring the oneness of the Oyo peoples (Schiltz, 1985). It has been noted that "*The Shango [sic] cult was...fused with Oyo's imperial administration to distribute the Alaafin's ritual power and political authority*" (Apter, 1992). This implies that wherever you went in the Oyo Empire, you would encounter Sango worship.

The worship of Sango had deep cultural significance within the Oyo Empire. Sango was regarded as a powerful and protective deity, associated with thunder, lightning, and fire. As the patron deity of warriors and kings, Sango embodied the qualities of strength, courage, and leadership that were highly esteemed in Oyo society. This cultural significance of Sango worship played a role in unifying the people of the Oyo Empire. (Olupona, 1991)

In addition to its cultural significance, Sango worship held great religious importance for the Oyo people. The religion of the Yoruba, known as Ifa, emphasized the veneration of deities and ancestral spirits. Sango, as one of the major Yoruba deities, was worshipped alongside other deities in the pantheon. The religious rituals associated with Sango worship, including offerings, sacrifices, and divination, provided a framework for communal participation and religious expression, fostering a sense of unity among the Oyo people (Bascom, 1969).

Among the 401 deities in the Yoruba pantheon, Sango holds a mysterious place in relation to the Alaafin's office. Before becoming a deity, Sango himself was an Alaafin. There are conflicting accounts regarding his death. While one version claims he disappeared into the ground, another asserts that he took his own life by hanging. The historical narrative that denies his suicide coined a phrase to honor him – “*Oba Koso*” (The king did not hang himself). During his time on earth, it was believed that Sango possessed such immense spiritual power that he could breathe fire and strike down enemies with lightning (Schiltz, 1985). After being deified following his death, it became widely accepted among the Yoruba people that Sango was the god of thunder and lightning who could use these natural forces to punish evildoers. It is likely due to Sango's reputation as a fierce god capable of dealing with rebellious individuals that he was chosen as the unifying deity of the Oyo empire.

To ensure that all the states under his reign subscribed to Sango worship, Alaafin appointed initiated Sango priests, called *ajele*, as his representatives of governors of those states. The role of the *ajele* in the tributary states was to unite them under the rule of Alaafin by passing down religious ideology, especially concerning Sango. The implication of this is that all the people under the rule of Alaafin are rallied together towards the knowledge and worship of Sango. In addition to the introduction of Sango worship in all the tributary states of the Oyo Empire, it is recorded in history that all the state leaders are mobilized to visit Oyo every year for an annual festival called *Beere* (Johnson, 1921; Apter, 1992). There is much uncertainty about the role of Sango during *Beere* festival in Oyo, but the role of the *ajele*, the resident Sango priests, is certainly of significance in making sure that everybody complies with this annual pilgrimage. In this way, Sango, whose worship is entrenched in the kingdom of Alaafin, serves as a spiritual unifying factor in the Oyo Empire. Meanwhile, to what extent did Sango worship foster unity among the people of the empire?

As we consider the effectiveness of the use of Sango worship as a unification factor in the Oyo Empire, a study also shows that although the empire appeared to have brought all its people together; nevertheless, there were still some tributary states that were not exhibiting total loyalty to the empire. There were still groups of people under the empire who were not committed to its oneness. Such states include Ketu, Sabe, Iganan, and Itasa (Schiltz, 1985). The reason for their non-commitment is under debate and beyond the scope of this study. However, some commentators attribute the states' rebellion to the existence of Ara, a rival cult, within their territory, others attribute it to poor administration on the part of the Oyo Empire.

In the long run, the empire fell. Arguably, one of the identified factors that contributed to its fall was its vast size. Discussing the fall of the empire, Otunola writes “*Oyo Empire became weakened due to frequent internal wrangling by different factions, former vassal's states reasserted their independence that by the mid-19th century, the Oyo Empire has become sacked and abandoned with the Empire disintegrating into small rival's chiefdoms and eventually falls to the expanding Islamic states to the north*” (Otunola, 2021). The fact that, like David, Alaafin rallied the people of their kingdom around the worship of a deity makes their practice a typology of Davidic unity reign.

IV. DISCUSSION

The Typology of the Davidic Reign in Oyo Kingdom

This paper argues that the Davidic reign and the Oyo Empire have similar characteristics. The main characteristic that justifies the Oyo Empire as a typology of the Davidic reign is the use of worship of a divine being as a tool of unification. The specific outlooks of the unification through worship are highlighted below.

Religious unity

In both cases, the unification was achieved through a common religious belief and the worship of a specific deity. The Israelites unified under the worship of Yahweh, while the Oyo Empire unified under the worship of Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning.

Centralization of power

The unification of both groups led to the establishment of a centralized authority. In the case of the Israelites, it was under the leadership of David. In the Oyo Empire, the Alaafin (king) became the central authority.

Political importance

The unification of the tribes of Israel and the Oyo Empire led to their political significance in their respective regions. The Israelites became a prominent force in the ancient Near East, while the Oyo Empire exerted political influence in Western Africa.

Expansion and control

Both groups expanded their influence by subjugating and bringing neighboring regions and kingdoms under their control. The Israelites conquered Canaanite cities, while the Oyo Empire dominated other Yoruba-speaking states.

Decline and disintegration

Both unifications eventually faced internal conflicts and external pressures that led to their decline. The Israelites faced divisions and conflicts that resulted in the split of the kingdom into Israel and Judah. Similarly, the Oyo Empire's decline was caused by internal conflicts, leading to its invasion and capture.

The use of "typology" in this study refers to something that is of striking resemblance to the other. Hence our claim is that Alaafin's unification of the Oyo Empire has a striking resemblance with the Davidic unity reign, in that both built unity around something God-like. The area of difference between the two political instances is the nature of the agent of unity. For David it was Yahweh and for Alaafin it was Sango.

The idea of Yahweh among the Israelites is about the unseen God who lives in heaven (Gen 24:3; 2 Chron 36:23; Ezra 1:2; 5:11,12; 6:9,10;7:12,21,23; Neh 2:4 Dan 2:29; Rev 11:13). The Yoruba are also aware of this same unseen God who lives in heaven and therefore call Him *Olorun* (He who owns the heaven or lives in heaven). However, the Alaafin's unification of the Oyo Empire is not about *Olorun* (God of heaven) but about one who was believed to be His agent, Sango.

While all the twelve tribes of Israel subscribed to the worship of Yahweh because of what He meant to them, not all the communities under the Oyo Empire subscribed to Sango. The divine figure of Sango does not mean the same thing to all the people under the rule of Alaafin. For instance, the people of Ketu, Sabe, and Itasa, seem to hold the Ara cult more dearly than the Sango cult (Schiltz 1985), as opposed to all the tribes of Israel who unanimously hold Yahweh as their one and only true God, who took them out of Egypt from the bondage of slavery. The universality of Yahweh makes His worship a more appropriate means of unification in Davidic unity reign, as opposed to the Alaafin's unification of the Oyo Empire, which used Sango as an instrument of threat to keep people together. In the case of Israel, all the tribes of the nation acknowledged the love of Yahweh, who brought them out of Egypt, gave them the Law, and stayed close to them (Deut 4: 5 – 7).

While in the Alaafin's case, the king used Sango as an instrument, in David's case God used the king as an instrument (Ps 89:20). God chose David knowing that he would do all that He had in mind as His loving will for His people, as enshrined in the Law (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). As argued in this paper, David's means of uniting Israel was worship. This happened because he allowed God to use him to call people to worship, a Law-stipulated cause in David's time, a generally accepted value to all the tribes of Israel (Deut 12:5 – 7, cf. Ex 20:24; Deut 26:2). David's intention for “*coordinating*” national worship reflects how he allowed God to use him as an instrument of His will, as opposed to using the person of God as an instrument of threat to maintain power. As such, leaders who are used by God to promote His universal values are the ones who truly unite people in their diversity.

Conclusion

As we study the similar characteristics between the Davidic reign and the Oyo Empire, the outstanding resemblance in the two instances are (1) religious unity, (2) centralization of power, (3) political importance, (4) expansion and control, and (4) decline and disintegration. On this basis was Oyo Empire regarded as the typology of Davidic reign. However, the most striking resemblance is the unification of both King David's Israel and Alaafin's Oyo Empire through a divine being – Yahweh and Sango respectively. However, the strength of the Davidic reign over the Oyo Empire is in the fact that Yahweh, the universal God, *used* David to unite all the tribes of Israel through worship, while Alaafin *used* Sango, a tribal god, to unify all the people under his ruler-ship.

As we consider the two similar reigns considering the biblical expectation for unification, we note that authentic unity is attained when political leaders give themselves to be *used* as a tool in God's hand to promote His universal values. The antithesis of this, found in the Oyo Empire, is that leaders may choose to *use* divine authority as an instrument of threat to maintain their political power, which only leads to spurious unity.

Recommendations

The aim of this study is to draw applicable practical lessons from the Davidic unity reign and Alaafin's unification of the Oyo Empire for contemporary African political leaders as they pursue national unity. The following are thereby recommended:

Promotion of universal values

As we noted in this study, Yahweh worship was a more acceptable means of unifying the tribes of Israel because the person of Yahweh meant the same thing to all the tribes, as opposed to the unification of the Oyo Empire through Sango worship that was somewhat imposed on part of the people groups. As political leaders pursue national unity, the focus must be on what their people have together in common. Care must be taken not to impose the values of one particular people, especially the one from the ruler's group, on other people groups.

Leadership personal character development

David's success in unifying the nation of Israel through Yahweh worship is drawn largely from his personal experience with the God he called his people to worship. God himself testified of David that he would do the right thing (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). It is naturally true that people are drawn to leaders of good character. They are naturally repelled by leaders whose personalities exude greed, selfishness, brutality, and so forth. The universal values that leaders seek to promote must emanate from who they are; otherwise, it will be tantamount to hypocrisy and manipulation.

Capitalizing on African spirituality

Drawing upon the rich tapestry of African spirituality, political leaders have a unique opportunity to tap into the deeply ingrained worldview of their people. The spiritual beliefs and practices of Africans are not confined to religious rituals alone but rather permeate every aspect of their daily lives. By recognizing and harnessing this spirituality, political leaders can create a system that serves as a unifying force for all members of society. This stands in contrast to the current approach which tends to compartmentalize factors that promote unity. Embracing the holistic nature of African spirituality offers a pathway toward inclusive governance that transcends ethnic divisions and fosters a sense of collective purpose. Through this integration, political leadership can forge new paths toward social cohesion and progress.

Areas for Further Research

As we embarked on this study, it was noted that the following areas are yet to be fully explored, and still not explored in this study due to its scope:

A study of individual Alaafin of the Oyo Empire and their unique use of Sango as a unifying factor

Alaafin is a title passed down to all the successive kings of the Oyo Empire. There is a need to examine the life and reign of each of the kings to identify their unique contributions to the Sango worship as a unification factor in the history of the empire.

The role of ajele and Sango worship in Beere festival in the Oyo Empire

The *Beere* festival, an extraordinary celebration within the Oyo Empire, holds a profound historical significance. While much has been written about this grand event, there has been a noticeable absence of discussion regarding the pivotal roles played by the *ajele*. Also the role of Sango worship in the festival is yet to be explored. Understanding the multifaceted contributions of the *ajele* and Sango worship allows us to appreciate the *Beere* festival in its entirety and grasp its intricate place within Oyo Empire's rich cultural tapestry.

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