Religion: Veritable Tool in Re-Engineering the Whole Drapery of the Nigerian Commonwealth

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Abstract

Fifty-seven years of freedom from colonial rule should be enough to teach us a lesson, yet the nation's progress is being seriously hampered by various types of selfish and chauvinistic values and aspiration. The peace and unity of the Nigerian nation since Independence have probably never been more threatened than they are at the moment. Politics seems to have failed woefully to unite Nigeria neither does the educational sector that has continued to nose-dive promise any hope. There seems to be hopelessness in the vista, but religion which looks like one of the factors causing disharmony in the polity has the propensity of turning around and making alive the Nigerian common wellbeing, otherwise known as the Nigeria commonwealth. Therefore, this work argued that the Christian Religion is veritable tool in re-engineering the whole drapery of the Nigerian Commonwealth. Using phenomenological method of analyzing social issues, the work concluded that the Christian religion is not doing enough in upgrading the general wellbeing of the Nigerian Commonwealth and recommended that, religious leaders and adherents of the Christian church have a greater role to play in teaching and promoting religious principles towards re-engineering the whole drapery of the Nigerian Commonwealth, thus preventing it from possible disintegration.

Keywords: Religion and Nigerian Commonwealth.

Introduction

Through the history of Nigeria's existence as an independent nation, myriad problems have worsened the nation's woes. The Nigerian economy has continuously proved incapable of generating growth and development, coupled with materialism, and corruption. The economy oscillates between bankruptcy and chronic impotence. The national treasury is treated like a personal account as it is notoriously looted by those in position into foreign accounts. The economy as known is the centre of life of every nation. A government is judged as good based on its economic success as the economy determines the growth in science and technology.

Yet fifty-seven years later, the nation's progress is being seriously hampered by various types of selfish and chauvinistic values and aspirations. Nigeria, a country which should be a model in native democratic principles for others to emulate in the continent of Africa is now plagued by vices that has affected the Nigerian Commonwealth and has driven the Nation to despair and distress whereby life becomes almost unbearable to live.

Today, the Nigerian Citizens have been subjected to a steady deterioration in the general standard of living and intolerable suffering that has risen higher. Scarcity of commodities has increased and unemployment has stretched to a critical dimension. The Nigerian Citizens now live in an age where vices of different kinds are clothed with clean dress as they are addressed with different euphemisms. This is where for instance, embezzlement is simply called by many "fastness", looting the government purse and eating of one's share of the national cake are ignored. These vices have become the silent status quo by which the society operates. Corruption is found everywhere in Nigeria.[1] This social cancer has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. Corruption is high among politicians, bureaucrats, academics, judiciary, police, army, customs and even religious organisations are not spared by this social malady. Bakare for instance

posits that no nation in the world is as corrupt as Nigeria,[2] though this writer is not in agreement for lack of supportive data and Gboyega submits that the practice has assumed a cultural view point.[3] It is said, 'corruption is innate and deep seated in Nigeria.[4] Corroborating above views, it is claimed corruption is as old as human existence and is perpetrated in all sectors of human existence.[5] Unfortunately, where such attitude exists, the commonwealth of the Nation will not be felt. Granted, corruption is a global malaise which has not spared any country of the world. However, its alarming pervasiveness in Nigeria in general have affected the country's guest for accelerated socio-economic and political development, thus becoming a matter of serious concern. This happened in spite of the view that a vast majority of Nigerians are ardent religious adherents. This of course brings to the question," is the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria an indication that the Christian church is not doing enough to correct the vices in the society that has undermined the fundamentals for a global ethics necessary for the modern Nation like Nigeria? In Nigeria, the odious socio-economic and religio-political events in the country since 1966 speak volumes of a people with neither convincing common beginning nor destiny. One of the factors that have hindered Nigeria from development is the incessant corrupt practices in spite of many churches.

The question now is, "where does the Christian and Christianity stand in the face of this economic dilemma where the Nigerian Christian rather belongs to the illegitimate yet operative status quo and survive or cling to the teaching of his faith and belong perpetually to the suffering class. Therefore, it is the trust of this paper to examine the issue of Religion as Veritable Tool in Re-engineering the Whole Drapery of the Nigerian Commonwealth.

The whole Drapery of the Nigerian Commonwealth

The Nigerian Economy

The economy is the centre of life of every nation. A government is judged as good based on its economic successes and graded as belonging

to the first, second and third world, based on its economic growth. The economy determines the growth in science and technology. Today, Nigeria is nothing more than a bastion of economic ruins. She has been out paced by her Asian counterparts and citizens only live in the reminiscence of her glorious economic past. The Nigerian Citizens here is subjected to a steady deterioration in the general standard of living, and intolerable suffering by the ordinary Nigerians has risen higher, scarcity of commodities has increased and unemployment has stretched to a critical dimension. According to Tinuku, it is a season of economic dryness.[6]

The Nigerian Christian Suffering amidst Plenty

Despite her rich human and natural wealth, Nigeria which ought to be a land flowing with milk and honey has been a failure and is now in shambles. The people generally live in want and squalor in a land of potential plenty. Even with her vast arable land, Nigeria is agriculturally a failure and very many Nigerians are now confronted, for the first time, with the possibility of death through starvation. Today, the average Nigerian family finds it increasingly difficult to make ends meet in the face of rising food prices and increasing rents. Thus, a Nigerian Christian live from hand to mouth. In a nutshell, poverty in this nation is a graphic illustration and manifestation of what literary critics would dub "suffering amidst plenty".

This predicament has been traced by writers to various causes, ranging from colonialism to mismanagement on the part of Nigerian past and present leaders. As can be seen from history, the industrialized nations of the West have a long standing connection with the economic scandal of our dear nation. Through colonialism, our natural resources were looted by Europe and the Nigerian subsistence farming system destroyed. The colonialists introduced farming of cash crops that would serve the needs of their home industries. They also enslaved young and virile youths of the nation; which affected the farming labour force and feeding. Moreso, they destroyed the country's legitimate local trade system and introduce "terms of trade" through which they manipulated Nigerian production by raising

the price of the country's imports and lowering the price of her raw material exports. Worse still, these "super powers" help the Nigerian nation to gear their economy towards the nation's security instead of developmental projects that would be beneficial to the generality of the people including the Nigerian Christian.[7]

Materialism

Through history, the concept of materialism has received so much attention from so many people in diverse ways. A little reflection on how people live their lives, how they strive to make it to the top through any available means points to an insatiable craving for riches. This concept of materialism can be considered from theoretical and practical points of view. Accordingly, materialism is a tendency to be more interested in material possession and physical comfort than in spiritual values. It could also be seen as a belief that only material things exist. The latter definition is what we refer to as theoretical while the former is practical.[8]Materialism is therefore a philosophic-ideological school that denies the place of God in the affairs of men. It's main teaching portends to demonstrate that the human person has enormous power to achieve whatever goal he sets for himself with no reference to the realm of the spirit. This ideology poses a big threat to Christianity. Materialism therefore is the tendency to value too much material things such as wealth, bodily comforts and too little value for spiritual things. The spirit of material things manifests itself in peoples' undue quest for material things to the detriment of their souls.

For the materialist, what matters in life is having enough of all his wants: enough food, money and drink, a good and well-furnished, cosy house and popcorn environment, "One-in-town" car, a good network of human relations and 'firm connections to ensure security. In short, for the materialist, life is wealth and wealth is life. However, even at the point of the attainment of all this, the materialist still hungers for more, more and more, confirming the position of the economist; "Man is an abundance of wants". Thus, "think of the people who have plenty of money which they

and their children's children can never exhaust, yet their preoccupation in life is to "rule" whatever circle they find themselves and when they are given the opportunity to rule any group of people they would like to remain in authority for 'eternity' because for them life without authority is not worth living. For them it is better to live a day like a lion as a ruler than to live a hundred years like a lamp and a subject."

The materialist seeks his personal interest in the here and now. What he can grasp is all that is important in life. The end justifies the means. The means can be anything under the sun. Proverbially he declares that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Baffled at such an unreflecting life that has lost consciousness of Godly morals, one that has no sense of the great beyond.The Christian church today is hit by this materialistic cankerworm and it is showcased everywhere, the lavish ornamental decorations in the churches and places of worship, the unhealthy but secret material competitions among Christians, the mentality to belong or celebrated, thereby becoming unduly worldly. These has retarded the progress of Christian witness and her contributions to Nigerian Commonwealth.

Adverse Effects of Materialism in our Society

According to Bartleby, materialism has forced people to think about their material needs even above the God. It has the following characteristics.

i. greed
ii. tendency to become rich quickly even if it involves a lot of risks.
iii. it involves the desire to live in plush houses
iv. wearing expensive cloths and driving flashy cars
v. it involves the urge to live extravagant life.[9]

Corruption

As an issue of universal concern, corruption has no unanimous definition as the subject differs from one country to the other. However, the World Bank defines corruption as:

> The abuse of public office for private gains. Public office is abused for private gain when an official accepts, solicits, or extorts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantages or profit. Public office can also be abused for personal benefit even if no bribery occurs, through patronage and nepotism, the theft of state assets, or the diversion of state resources.[10]

Deji Aiyegboyin sees corruption as all forms of bribery, unwarranted exercise of power, intentional neglect of a recognized duty; and all forms of favour done with the motive of gaining some advantages.[11] P. A. Ojebode asserts that corruption is an effort to accumulate private wealth through an authorised use of public resources; he further sees it as misappropriation of public funds, unfaithfulness in the use of time and discharge of pubic function, seeking of favour and deliberate negligence of official duty for private interest at the expenses of the public.[12] A. A. Adegbola asserts that corruption is the use of position to exhort something either in cash or kind from the public in furtherance personal gain, contrary to expected behaviour attached to the position occupied.[13] According to O. P. Oke, corruption is a dishonest, illegal or immoral behaviour, especially from someone with power. It has equally been described as the misuse of power, it is for private gains.[14] P. E. Igbinova sees corruption as "all forms of bribery, abuse of office and nepotism, any favour done in expectation of material or non-material gain or even in reward of an earlier deed.[15] According to the ICPC Act (Section 2), corruption includes vices like bribery, fraud, and other related offences. Corruption is the abuse or misuse of power or position of trust for personal or group benefit (monetary or otherwise.)[16] From the discussions above, it could be deduced that

corruption is rampant in activities that involve financial dealing, though it includes other unacceptable behaviour in the society.

Characteristics of Corruption

(i) a means to obtain something;
(ii) the hidden and intransparent nature of activity;
(iii) the illegal search for personal advantage;
(iv) the illegal acquisition of something which one does not deserve;
(v) the economically inefficient use of funds;
(vi) very often proximity to blackmail, abuse of public power, nepotism;
(vii) the breach of confidence;
(viii) the damage of moral integrity and of general ethos;

Causes of Corruption

a. A number of things cause corruption. According to corruption survey (2017) and among them are;
b. **Creed:** This has caused a lot of crises in the world, including in Nigeria. It is because of greed that political leaders embezzle from the funds they are supposed to use for national development for their own selfish needs.
c. **Poor Youth Empowerment:** Poor moral youth empowerment is a contributor to corruption. Internet fraud, sexual harassment and other bad acts because Nigerians lack understanding on the importance of youth empowerment. When parents and government empower youths both financially and morally, the level of corruption among them will diminish.
d. **Poverty**: According to international standards of poverty, a person is said to be poor when he lives under $1.25 (N210, though it varies) per day. According to World Bank Group, in 2004, 63.1% of Nigerians were poor. The poverty level increased in 2010. It is one of the reasons why the poor youths in the country collect bribes to work as thugs for Nigerian politicians.

e. **Unemployment:** The youths, fathers and mothers are seriously lamenting on the negative impact of unemployment in their lives. Some said that it is better for death to come and take their lives than suffering under torment of unemployment. Words cannot explain the level of punishment the citizens of this country are as a result of this menace.

Evil Effects of Corruption

One of the evil effects of corruption is that it hinders economic development. "It opens the door for inefficient allocation of resources as well as raises the cost of investment and decreases investors' confidence. Research has revealed that countries with notoriously high levels of corruption risk marginalization in a world of rapid economic integrity. Also, the diversion of public funds enriches some and impoverishes others. It kills initiatives of potential experts in the private sectors and sacrifices efficiency on the greedy hands alters of mismanaging abundant wealth. Moreover, it desecrates the rule of law and undermines the legitimacy and stability of democratic regimes. Corruption demolishes the elements of prudent management of wealth and resources. Irrational and short-sighted decisions are taken. These are motivated by greed but not need. Approvals of projects are met premised not on the basis of suitability but on the dividends for the decision-makers.

The Role of Religion in the Society

Religion as an integral part of societies is found to have predominant influence on the people. Religion constitute of set of norms, and dogmas that relate the individual with the supernatural being. Thus the following roles:

i. Religion is meant to ensure the continued peace and order in society so as to enhance man's capabilities and wellbeing.[17]
ii. Religion is a mechanism of adjustment and of solving problems not only of overcoming anxiety but also of ordering one's relationship

with the supernatural and in the process supporting social norms and integrating society and personalities.[18]

iii. Religion contributes to law and order in the society by creating conditions for social wellbeing, self-discipline, social cohesion and the continuity of cultures and tradition. Coser counters this role by Durkheim by insisting that the historical evidence available has proved religion also to be divisive. This is especially true in situations where the existing religious groups tend to compete each other. Durkheim's solidarity must therefore be different from stability.[19]

iv. Religion as a dimension of human nature stands to inject fundamental and ultimate meaning and explanation into human existence and life. Thus, any form of religious practice that fosters progress must be creative, progressive and ecumenical in outlook, dynamic in action, up-to-date in time, consequential in role and under the leadership of a knowledgeable, magnanimous and compassionate body of clergyman.[20]

v. Religion through its exhortation and programme measure of actions helps to wipe out mass illiteracy from the face of the society. It is also the responsibility of religion to re-orientate our people to appreciate the institutions and values of our culture. This is important because if you don't fight for your right, nobody else would do it for you.[21]

vi/. Through religion, truth and liberty as instruments of progress in our culture could be enhanced through preaching and writings which are the essence of these virtues. The fact that religion inculcates and promotes such lofty human and democratic values such as social justice, solidarity, equality, religious freedom, independence and integrity, religion cannot be undermined in its virile role of progress.[22]

The Christian Religion as a tool in re-engineering the whole Drapery of the Nigerian Commonwealth

Since corruption is responsible in large measure for the broken promises, the dashed hopes and the shallow dreams that have characterised the existence of the multitude of Nigerians in the last few years. The church has the following roles to play in the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

i. The church must draw up an analysis, when one's own organisation faces corruption and how to deal with it.
ii. Working out biblical theological instruments on corruption.
iii. Signing the code of conduct against corruption which contains eight principles; respect for human dignity, aspect for moral integrity, promotion of justice, fostering of transparency, rejection of all forms of corruption, respect for the law, the right to disclose and combat corruption, the priority of the public interest over private interests.
iv. Participation in national legal revisions to fight corruptions.
v. Public statements of churches against corruption in one's own country must be made.
vi. Implementation or support of an anti-corruption campaign ("Zero-tolerance campaign" like e.g. the one of the government of Botswana).
vii. Cooperation with the national chapters of transparency international.
viii. Dialogue between churches and companies as to the issue must be encouraged.
ix. There must be a vibrant national view centered on the fear of God, after all, swearing with the Bible is an indication of wearing individual and national conscience around religion.
x. Performance of duties must be seen as an opportunity to serve the nation and put national interest over and above individual interest.
xi. Christian leaders need to wake up from their slumber and take the message of the cross more seriously.

xii. Religion should not be seen as a means of amassing wealth neither should they spare the corrupt individuals and government officials in the course of preaching sermons.

xiii. Christian leaders should see their call as a means of inculcating the fear of God and the values of honesty, hard work, accountability and concern for the common good in their members.

xiv. Lastly, individuals and adherents must be ready to face the challenges of life and play down complete dependence on miracles and healings. They must remember to pay attention to the provisions of the criminal codes against the various shades of corruption and must have the fear of God in their hearts and imbibe this in their children.

Recommendations

i. The church must share in common transcendental values and moral principles.

ii. The church must promote high ethical standards among her adherents.

iii. There should be a proper dissemination of the Christian message that will help to checkmate the human instinct to grab and to accumulate for self while neglecting the common good.

iv. Government, religious leaders and the entire citizens must play their roles if Nigeria is to be transformed from the high position in the gang of the most corrupt nations in the world, to a high position among the most corruption free nations. On the part of the government, those in power must fear God and practice their religious obligations and national duties sincerely. Religious leaders must wake up from their slumber and take the message of the cross more seriously. Individuals and adherents of the church must be ready to face the challenges of life and play down complete dependence on miracles and healings.

Conclusion

Clearly the Christian Religion have a central role in the formulation of worldviews that orient us to the natural world and the articulation of ethics that guide human behaviour. The size and the complexity of the problems we face require collaborative efforts both among the religions and in dialogue with other key domains of human endeavour. The church thus, need to be in conversation with other sectors for adequate distribution of resources for the Nigerian Commonwealth. It has observed that assisting humans by degrading the natural world cannot lead to a sustainable community like Nigeria. The only sustainable community is one that fits the human economy of the earth. With the help of church, humans are now advocating for restraint in the use of natural resources on which all life depends, equitable distribution of wealth, recognition of responsibility of humans for the continuity of life into future generations. These are the virtues for sustainability, which the world's religions and the church can contribute which in turn will assist in the fight for the Nigerian Commonwealth.[23]

From the issues discussed, it could be seen that there is a serious imbalance between the church and corruption in Nigeria. A dislocation has occurred in the symbiotic relationship between the church and corruption. Where the level of spirituality is high, all things being equal, the level of corruption should decline. The situation in Nigeria is such that not only has church not doing enough to reduce corruption, but religion itself has become a channel of corruption, providing support for corruption in the society, as true religion shares in common transcendental values and moral principles and also promotes high ethical standards.

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