

INTEGRITY AS A CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS VALUE VERSUS CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: A DISLOCATED RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

Integrity as the practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values, is a virtuous value which the society at large expect its members to inculcate. As a Christian religious value, Christians are expected to promote social control and live acceptable standard of lives in the society thereby assisting in reducing vices such as corruption in Nigeria. Focusing on the Christian religion, this paper argues that the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria today is an indication that the Christian religion is not doing enough in promoting integrity as a religious value in the society. The paper adopted a descriptive analytical methodology making use of both primary and secondary sources for its research. The work discovered that Christianity has been bastardized and commercialized to the extent that it is losing its appeal as a promoter of integrity as a religious value. The paper concluded that Christianity as an antivirus is not doing enough in its function to cure a virus such as corruption in Nigeria and recommended that religious leaders, Christians and entire masses should get involved in the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

Keywords: Integrity, Christian religious values, Christianity, Corruption.

Introduction

There is a consensus that corruption is a human problem. It has existed in all ages and in every part of the world. Corruption is fond everywhere in Nigeria (Agenyi and Ameh, 2009). This social cancer has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. Akung and Nathaniel avail that with corruption, the poverty level in Nigeria... has reached the extreme limit (p.2). Corruption is high among politicians, bureaucrats, academics,

judiciary, police, army, custom and even religious organizations are not spared by this social malady. According to Bakare (2011) no nation in the world is as corrupt as Nigeria, though this scholar is not in agreement for lack of supportive data and Gboyega (1996) submits that the practice of corruption in Nigeria has assumed a cultural view point. Thus, it is said, “Corruption is innate and deep seated in Nigeria” (Rotimi, Obasaju and Joseph, 2013).

Corroborating above views, it is claimed corruption is as old as human existence and is perpetrated in all sectors of human existence. Thus, corruption is an indication of absence of human values. (Ehusani, 2003). This happened in Nigeria in spite of the view that a vast majority of Nigerians are ardent Christian religious adherents. Christianity does not only prepare adherents for life everlasting after the existence in the physical world, but also ensures that adherents live a holy and pure live. Hence, adherents are expected too imbibe some values and virtues to promote peace in the society. This implies that Christianity serves as a means of social control.

Unfortunately, Christianity as practiced by both religious leaders and adherents in Nigeria today has become commercialized to the extent that anything goes. From theft of church money to ritual killing, from deceits by religious leaders to willingness of followers to engage in dastardly acts, from fornication and adultery by Christians to hero worship of criminals, from acquisition of titles and self proclamations such as Bishop, Apostle, Dr. and so on. This of course brings in the question, is the prevalence of corruption in the Nigerian society an indication of the fact that the Christian Church is not doing enough to serve as a social control (Yusuf, 2003).

The question now is, “where does the Christian or Christianity stand in the face of promoting integrity as a Christian religious value?” It is against this background that this paper is aimed at looking at the role of the Christian Religious Value – integrity in curbing corruption in the Nigerian society.

Conceptual Clarification

Integrity

One of the oldest meanings of integrity refers to its etymology. Integrity is terms from the Latin word “integritas” or “integer” which means wholeness or unit. It also carries the meaning of entire, a whole or untouched, intact,

sound, true or reliable (Lisa, 2015; Zaidi and Sani, 2011; Mustafar, 2009). Integrity is attributed to various parts or aspects of a person's life. There are those attributes such as professional, intellectual and artistic integrity. Integrity is more than ethics at the individual level. It is all about the character of the individual. It is those characteristics of an individual that are consistently considerate, compassionate, transparent, honest, and ethical.

According to Cox, La Caze, and Levine (2001), the most philosophically important sense of the term "integrity" relates to general character. Integrity communicates to self and others in a way that psychic wholeness or individuation does not. It is this quality of communicability that reduces integrity such an essential factor in psychotherapeutic practice. It determines the way in which the individual relates to the world and to others in the world as well as to his or her own self.

Integrity can be understood as a particular moral, as opposed to psychological attribute which has a direct relationship with the rest of the subject's moral being while being independent of it at the same time. It is a given of personality and cannot be achieved, Gross (2001). Competencies are meaningless if lacking trust. Individuals who are not trustworthy will not be given opportunities or responsibilities; and they will not be wanted as team members by clients or other employees. Individuals are untrustworthy without integrity. Individuals who own integrity will commit to choosing right before they find themselves in a situation, Ougley (2007).

Corruption

In its simplest form, corruption means to destroy the purity of something. According to Labanjo (1970) corruption is not manifested in fraud or diversion of physical and tangible things alone, it goes beyond this to encompass abuse, rottenness, misuse, decay and depravity. It is akin to what Akung and Nathaniel (2021) described as rape of hope (p.51). The Act establishing the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) in Nigeria defines corruption as including bribery, fraud and other related offences (Corrupt Practices Act, 2000). Corruption is defined by the World Bank as "the abuse of public office for private gains." This involves the seeking or exacting of a promise or receipt of a gift or any other advantage by a public servant in violation of duties required of the office. It may also involve extortion of monies or theft by

public servants of amounts due or payable to public coffers (Cited in Onuoha, 2003).

To Otite, as cited in Onu (2001), corruption is the reversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity. According to Ikeanyibe and Imhanlahimi (2006), corruption is antithesis to ethics and accountability. The authors adduced a few reasons for the precarious situation of corruption in Nigeria among which are ineffective institutions, weak rule of law, low popular participation in politics, weak protection of civil liberties, closed economic and political systems, poor remuneration of public servants to mention but a few. Nevertheless, according to Ighodalo, (2001), while the aforementioned factors cannot be overlooked, moral leadership and true commitment to the service of the nation are at the centre of the situation.

According to Mark and Ulrich (1999), corruption is the abuse public power for personal interests. This definition includes most of all the active or passive bribery between a civil servant and a private person. Yet, corruption also includes activities between private persons, and when the behaviour of people with public or private tasks is corrupt when they violate their duties to obtain any kind of unjustified advantages. For Peter Ulrich (1999), the economic ethic – philosopher, corruption is the undermining of the common wellbeing through particular interests of individuals. This shows how ethically explosive the issue is.

Integrity and Corruption in Nigeria: A Dislocated Relationship

According to Henslin (2007), the Christian Religion serves the following functions among others; provides guidelines for everyday life through rules and regulations on what to do and what to abstain from and more so provide social control so that fairness and justice will be displayed. Today, most Nigerians are religious. They believe in the supremacy of God and that God is the basis of their individual and corporate lives. The Bible shows clearly the foundations of the Christian faith. Romans 12:2 says, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Matthew 6:33 adds that “but seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.” Luke 9:23 says “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Lastly, Matthew 5:13 and 14 refers to Christians as salt and light of the world, indicating that they

occupy special place in the scheme of events and to be examples for the world to emulate.

Nigerians relate with supernatural realities through prayers, supplications, fasting and offering of sacrifices. Ever since the spread of the gospel to the country, Nigerians have embraced and adopted and practiced it with favour and passion. In the recent past, the spirit of “born againism” has taken over. Churches are found in all nooks and crannies of the streets.

There are churches in the forests, riversides, on hilltops and mountains. Crusades are organized daily. Worship sessions and vigils take place every minute of every day of the week. People go in large number of pilgrimage taking pride in being addressed as JPs. According to Ehusani (2003), while there is noticeable decline in religious fervour in many parts of the world, the religious enterprise appears to be thriving very much in Nigeria, as more people are being converted, many houses and house wares are being turned to churches, sport stadia are being used more for religious functions than for sporting activities. Streets and highways are blocked at regular interval for religious meetings and crusades.

To Yusuf (2003), unfortunately in most of these Churches, holiness seems to be unpopular, as the vows of celibacy and life devoid of glitters has been overtaken and replaced by pastors with flamboyant lifestyles, beautifully groomed hair, expensive clothes and shoes, posh homes and cars and even private jets. These clerics tell their congregation that their God is not a poor God, a cliché that has earned them the name “prosperity preachers.” Some have gone a step further to seek and acquire fetish power so as to be able to tell their followers certain secrets and to make predictions for them. Some are believed to use “anointed” handkerchiefs, anointed rings, holy water etc. to cure sicknesses and diseases. Where then lies the place for integrity?

This is why an individual will lose attention to detail when ones actions and words will cause the person to make silly mistakes. It will further leads to lack of discipline whereby an individual reputation will suffer that can result in health issues. Thus, from all indications and outward manifestations, Nigerians seem to be incurably religious and perhaps the most religious in the world. But in the face of this fervour and religiosity, should order, peace, love, selflessness, charity, humanity to man, and other fruits of the spirit listed in (Galatians 5:22, 23) not be clearly visible and manifested in Nigeria, Should there be corruption, rancor, poverty, inhumanity, poor governance and lack of integrity?

Today, social solidarity is low as believers are no longer united into a community that shares Christian values. Fairness and justice are scarce commodities especially when politicians and rich people are accorded more recognition and attention than the poor in the same church and where virtues of criminals and fraudsters are extolled openly. Foremost, Adeleke (2003) claims that Nigerian leaders over the last 40 years have created an environment that is conducive for corrupt practices while a disoriented and impoverish followership, and anybody else operating in this environment, quickly learns to tow the line and take full advantage.

Apart from the government, society itself has further encouraged corruption through excessive hero worship bordering on mass sycophancy. This manifest in the attitude of “my leader, right or wrong”, my town by hook or crook, my tribe, right or wrong. It is the root of such ethnic and tribal sentiments that many people use to foster corruption. In the face of the contradiction and the embarrassment of a booming Christianity in the midst of an environment that stinks with corruption and indiscipline, the conclusion seems to be that what is spreading like wild fire in Nigeria is not genuine Christianity at all, but a mass movement of some sort with Christian elements of ritualism, one that is largely shallow, superficial, noisy and devoid of substance and depth.

Religion has failed in its responsibility to mould the character of the adherents. Religion itself has been thoroughly exploited and manipulated in Nigeria by “smart” men for political and economic gains. The message of the cross is fundamental and central to the Christian religion, but popular religion in Nigeria has sidelined the cross and all the spiritual values associated with it. This religion declares all failure, suffering and pain as of the devil while associating with God only wealth, success, healing and prosperity.

Recommendations

- i. Those in power must fear God and practice their religious obligations and national duties sincerely. This will earn them moral support from the followers.
- ii. There must be a vibrant national view centered on the fear of God, after all, swearing with the Bible is an indication of weaving individual and national conscience around religion.
- iii. Performance of duties must be seen as an opportunity to serve the nation and put national interests over and above individual interests.

- iv. Religious leaders must wake up from their slumber and take the message of the cross more seriously. They should not see religion as a means of a massing wealth, neither should they spare the corrupt individuals and government officials in the course of preaching sermons. They should see their call as a means of inculcating the fear of God and the values of integrity for the concern for the common good in their members.
- v. Individuals and adherents must be ready to face the challenges of life and play down complete dependence on miracles and healings.
- vi. Lastly, they must pay attention to the provisions of the criminal codes against the various shades of corruption.

Conclusion

It could in conclusion be seen that there is a serious imbalance between the Christian religion and corruption in Nigeria. A dislocation has occurred in the symbiotic relationship between the Christian religion and corruption. The situation in Nigeria is such that not only has religion failed to reduce corruption, but religion itself has become a channel of corruption, providing support for corruption in the society. True religion shares in common transcendental values and moral principles and also promotes high ethical standards.

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