

# **Biblical Appraisal of Clerical Corruption in Nigeria in Relation to Integrity**

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## **Abstract**

Integrity has become a prominent concept in research relating to governance as was as in actual policy making at all levels, but has not been linked to clerical leadership in Nigeria. The need therefore to survey integrity as it relates to clerical leadership in Nigeria becomes paramount. This paper intends to survey clerical corruption in Nigeria visa-vis the basic Christian ideals of integrity orchestrated by Biblical morality. This contribution will address the fallouts in clerical Christian leadership about integrity and concern for others. This paper used documentation method for data collection. Primary data was gotten from the Bible whereas secondary data was derived from published works concerning integrity and clerical corruption in Nigeria. Textual method was used to describe, interpret and understand the context. Significantly, biblical integrity becomes the basis for the clergy and Christians in Nigeria, and consequently the correction of the whims and caprices found in their unchristian life-styles. This will then a life of integrity becomes the norm for both Christians and public servants alike. The paper recommends the extension of ecumenical responsibility and propagation of not only the message but the curbing of excesses of Christian clerics.

**Keywords:** Clerical corruption, Biblical appraisal, Clerical leadership in Nigeria, and Integrity.

## **Introduction**

More than any other time, there is an increasing global awareness of the importance and crucial role of the practice of integrity and honesty in human life and society.<sup>1</sup> But there is lack of it in Christianity and clerical work. Christianity which connotes the original form of worship and access to God as taught by Jesus Christ himself to those who do not yet know him in order to make them believers of God and showing high integrity. Thus there is every need to survey integrity from biblical perspective for the Christians and the clergy and by extension the general public. Again, there has been an extensive research on integrity on government and governance as well in actual policy making, yet, there is lack of it in clerical *modus operandi*. This paper therefore survey's the basic Christian ideals of integrity orchestrated by biblical morality. The paper use documentation methods of data collection. Primary data was derived from the Bible whereas the secondary data was sourced from published works on integrity and clerical corruption in Nigeria. Textual method was used to described, interpret and understand the context. This paper is significant because it will re-awaken the fact of integrity not just among the clergy but also among the Christians, which is the preaching of the "Good News" to both the faithful and non-believers with the aim of obtaining a change of heart and incorporation into the church through baptism or to make more perfect Christians of the people.<sup>2</sup> This will in no small measures grow human integrity and honesty.

Ngewa points to the fact that, many African Christians can be described as practicing religiosity without integrity (Christ).<sup>3</sup> Ngewa again informs that African are religious at heart and by tradition, and many have joined the church just to get a religious feeling or because church attendance is fashionable, without experiencing a new birth. Unfortunately, no matter how religious one is, "there is no access to the Kingdom of God without a new birth."<sup>4</sup> This failure is attributed to the church today namely the clergy and teachers to minister to each member of the congregation at a personal level.<sup>5</sup> That is to say that, some members

of the clergy lack personal integrity and have always looked up to their person and material prosperity than the growth of the church. This has resulted to the “Moral corruption and decadence” and Christianity has suffered “shipwreck on the rocks of faithlessness, greed and indulgence.”<sup>6</sup> Oke has stated the obvious that “The most disturbing and quite unfortunate trend today is about those who use the name of God to perpetrate evil and engage in corrupt practices... financial fraud and sexual immorality.”<sup>7</sup> All these are signs of decay of integrity of Christianity in Nigeria. Asue corroborates to this that “In Africa and the modern Nigeria in particular, the simple saying, “by their fruits we shall know them” works out fine... because these false prophets have certain and peculiar unchristian syndrome which is exemplified in their activities and way of life.”<sup>8</sup> Asue is right because some of the clergy lack integrity and indulge in immoral fashions of greed, sexual scandal, corruption and embezzlement of church funds.

## **Clarification of Concepts**

### **Clerical Corruption**

Though corruption cannot be easily defined, its use here refers to “any act that is antithetical to explicit or implicit rules of conduct in a social setting.”<sup>9</sup> Clerical Corruption essentially involves those negative acts against the principles of accountability, transparency, ethical and moral standards in the course of responsibility discharge or social interaction of the clergy.

### **Integrity**

Walker in Orr defines Integrity in-teg’-ri’-ti (*tom, tummah*) the translation of *tom*, “simplicity”, “soundness”, “completeness” rendered also “upright”, “perfection”. Its original sense appears in the phrase *letom* (I Kings 22:34; II Chronicles 18:33). It is translated “Integrity” (Genesis. 20:56; I Kings 9:4; Psalms 7:8, 25:21, 26:1, 11, 41:12, 78:72; Proverbs 19:1; 20:7) in all which places it seems to carry the meaning of simplicity or sincerity of heart and intension, truthfulness and uprightness.<sup>10</sup>

In the plural (*tummin*) it is one of the words of the breast plate of the high priest (Exodus 28:30; Deuteronomy 33:8; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65) on of the sacred lots indicating, perhaps, “Innocence”, or “Integrity.”<sup>11</sup>

## **A Survey of Clerical Corruption in Nigeria**

Ekwunife attests to the insufficiency in moral and spiritual matters that amidst Nigerian present socio-political, economic and educational doldrums, one is impelled to question the relevance of Christianity as a catalyst in solving the problems of the country. It becomes more acute of the claims of Christianity with effective potentials for moral and spiritual rejuvenation.<sup>12</sup> Oke points to the same situation that “The most disturbing and quite unfortunate trend today is about those who use the name of God to perpetrate evil and engage in corrupt practices”. And that “many religious leaders are known to engage in financial fraud and sexual immorality.”<sup>13</sup>

To support the theoretical explanations above one finds the story of one Evangelist plausible. Ogedengbe in Oke informs that an Evangelist was arrested in Ondo State for stealing musical instruments worth N3 million which he reportedly sold at the Alaba International market, Lagos. When caught, he pleaded for mercy or forgiveness and attributed his action to the hand work of the devil. Some time ago Rev. King, pastor of a Pentecostal Church in Lagos was openly accused of adultery, possessing of a secret shrine behind his church, his claim to be “God” and many scandalous acts.<sup>14</sup> Obiora in Oke has supported the above corrupt revelations that today in Nigeria; there are many buoyant commercial Evangelists who grew big and heavy through gross exploitation of the poor and the ignorant masses,<sup>15</sup> confirming the Marxian celebrated dictum of religion as the opium of the masses, namely, its role in the sustenance of relations of domination.<sup>16</sup>

The rapid increase of false prophets in Nigeria and Africa is alarming. There is a case of John Mmuo Nso, one of the prophets of the *Holy Chapel of Israel Church* whose ultimate aim is the collection money. Having acquired so much wealth, he has married three wives and raised magnificent buildings in his premises.<sup>17</sup> These unchristian acts makes for such conclusions that Christianity with its adherents “far from articulating and practicalizing the good ideals taught them, act in contra-belief to the up-liftmen of human dignity. Love and good neighborliness have lost the uniting appeal they contain, giving way to destructive and antithetical codes of conduct.”<sup>18</sup> A former prelate of *The Methodist Church in Nigeria*, his Pre-eminence Sunday Mbang said “The Church has turned to a den of robbers... that marketing God has led to high level

of corruption, immorality and other forms of indiscipline in our society today.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Adesokan in Oke “accused Church leaders of polluting the religious atmosphere in the country... the churches have concerned themselves so much with material wealth that their energies are often directed at preserving their positions and titles rather than saving souls.”<sup>20</sup>

Look at a situation where a pastor of a renowned Pentecostal church defrauded public funds during president Olusegun Obasanjo’s regime, or where the leadership tussle of a familiar church remains unsettled due to falsification of signatures to secure approval of the Corporate Affairs Commission all having negative impact on the Church and Christianity in general.<sup>21</sup> It has become a common phenomenon for pastors becoming stooges of government only to rubbish their integrity. Others perform ritual parade and perform prophetocracy to help government. Such attendance to government functionaries or the government functionaries attendance to church programmes should not be to carry financial favour, but to preach the truth and righteousness to those in positions of authority.<sup>22</sup> Pastor E.A Adebayo’s assertion becomes relevant here that:

As true children of the Most High, these times are more trying for us because immorality and wickedness have become the norm, hence, it has become so easy for Christians to condone, rationalize and practice some sins they would normally never have come close to many. Christians are losing sight of their calling and their goal (Heaven) their love for God and their fellow human is running cold as stated in *Matthew 24:12*.<sup>23</sup>

Dickson has shown that many Christian leaders have also distorted their share of the truth in order to create their beliefs after either their traditions, human generated, emotional hysteria, thirst for power, or carnal desires to live according to the dictates of humanity.”<sup>24</sup> He concludes, “they are thus *churchian*, not Christian after the true definition of biblically defined Christian. “*Churchianity*” as defined by Dickson implies firstly that the power structure of church of this system of religion is focused on man. Secondly, professionals among the leadership of these church upholds the power of structures, therefore the budgets of churchian groups appropriates greater amount to the

religious/professionals, and the least of the budget goes towards evangelism and benevolence. Lastly some physical manifestation is emphasized to identify the existence or uniqueness of the churchian group. Talking about elaborate structures in the community that promote fulfillment in belief and presence.<sup>25</sup>

### **Integrity and Christian Ministry**

Integrity presupposes “Perfection”, “Completeness”, “Uprightness” and “truthfulness”.<sup>26</sup> If practiced with utmost moral underpinnings, the result is a passage into public worship of the church what *The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home* calls the “Sacred Congregation of Divine Worship” and “norms applicable to its own liturgy”.<sup>27</sup> There is therefore the need for integrity vitality in Christian Ministry and the need to response to it.

In the first place integrity brings about the pursuit of “Due Process”. This is part of the expression of “due process of the law” which signifies a comprehensive and highly developed system of structures, procedures, and principles for the protection of rights should they be threatened<sup>28</sup> and in this case by church leadership and vice versa. Both the clergy and laity must follow the church law for the protection of rights, particularly in administrative proceedings. This calls for greater structuring of administrative discretion through careful description of the competence of each policy making mandatory statements of findings in support of decisions; and fair and full hearings of persons whose right could be adversely affected.<sup>29</sup>

The early Apostles provided “due process” to the early church in their daily ministration and were able to overcome the murmurings that come as a result of the breach of the Grecians rights by the Hebrews (Acts 6:1-7). This did not only perfect the church but also showed uprightness and provided the ground for the growth of the church, as long as integrity is concerned.

Again, while it is true that authority in the church lies with the clergy while civil authorities, it must be known that authority comes from God and does not depend on the consent of the governed. It is also true that it does not operate in isolation from the rest of the Christian community, by virtue of the fact that the Holy Spirit is present in all members of the church with their distinctive roles and Charisms.<sup>30</sup> This is how integrity

works in Christian ministration. In this way the teaching authority of the clergy will be responsible for certifying what is genuine Christian doctrine. In this process therefore the historical experience of the whole church, the truths of revelation, and the reflections of theologians are important complements to the clergy authority.<sup>31</sup>

So as Buckland would want us to believe character and integrity are the greatest safeguards and health-guiding boundaries to the use of power and authority. He points to the fact the God has built his church where peace reigns and other leaders demonstrate leadership integrity that should be envy of the world.<sup>32</sup> This means that, the best leadership power motif is to the desire to see God's church built up needs to be the central driving force behind Christian leadership. It is a desire to engage in the ministry in such a way that God receives the glory and the church is equipped<sup>33</sup> with moral armament to practice with integrity.

So, good Christian leadership, then requires an empowering mentality along with good character. Ministers should therefore act with integrity because they are seen are considered by the community to be respectable figures. The powers and authority they have, which could lead them into potential abusive situations, may be put to good use in the church and community. They are to use their position to bless the church and enable people to nature in their walk with god. They should also be effective in making charges in the local community that will benefit all through engaging the self-focused agenda.<sup>34</sup>

Building integrity in ministry means being consistent with God's will for you, then loving his people he has entrusted to your care. For the maintenance of ministerial integrity, Christian leaders should lead by example; commit to being involved in church process; anticipate doctrinal and ethical conflicts; communicate the message of God with civility; be consistent with godly laws; they should listen; accept that people have different standards within their ethical standards; support the church; be organized and they must keep learning. This is mainly because the Christian church is a teaching and a learning institution.

Generally, therefore, the relationship between integrity and Christian ministry becomes clear. It becomes the strength of an advancing believers it means wholeness of character, consistency of word and deed; it means uncompromising adherence to God's code of values, it means living by the word of God, and by understanding God's plan as an integrated

system, where behavior can adhere to all God's mandates. The Christian by this can avoid taking favourite biblical principles out of their doctrinal context. Believers who live within God's system of power and love have Christian integrity in the ministry.<sup>35</sup>

### **Biblical Templates for Integrity Among the Clergy in Nigeria**

The appraisal nature of this paper necessarily demands putting forward the 'criteria' in a very loosed meaning but more or less a 'standard' to which efforts will be made to provide a "Canon" for the clergy. This is tantamount to revealing more avenues to facilitate more comprehensive understanding and effective application of the gospel message in our contemporary decaying society,<sup>36</sup> that lacks integrity.

It must then be agreed that the Old and the New Testaments are essentially valuable to the provision of guides towards the Christian fulfillment of integrity. The Mosaic system was designed to be temporary preparatory dynasty that looked forward ultimately to the establishment of Christian integrity (Galatians 3:24-25). Biblically, one sign that a true prophet of God with integrity was known was the fulfillment of his prediction (Jeremiah.28:9,16ff). That is, the conformity of his teaching to the traditional doctrine (Jer. 28:7ff). What Asue calls the "analogy of faith"<sup>37</sup> was required and if these are lacking, such prophets were called "false prophets."<sup>38</sup>

Asue citing the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* mentioned the theoretical norm by which a prophet might be judged namely: "the self-proclaimed prophet whose words led the people astray from strict Yahwetism was a false one and equally so the prophet whose prediction was not verified by subsequent history" (Deut13:1-5; 18: 20-22) True prophets were therefore indicated by the agreement of their words with history.<sup>39</sup>

Besides, a "true" prophet of God was not only involved in healing, seeing visions and dreaming dreams but integrity was indispensable, because there had to be a strict harmony between his claimed religious experiences and his moral life.<sup>40</sup>

A similar religious personality was the priest who performed complex and energy sapping liturgical services.<sup>41</sup> Some of the duties of the priest included teaching (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 33: 10) without remuneration (Micah 3:11); judging or settling difficult lawsuits among the people (Deuteronomy 17:8;19:17-21;25:5) and blessing the



people in the name of the Lord (Numbers 19:22-27). Holiness was needed in exercising the office. This was emphasized by God that his servants must be holy. Again for one to be a priest, he must be obedient to marital sacrament.

The New Testament is equally loaded with the ethical qualifications for men of God just like the Old Testament where the demands of the prophets are theologically based namely that “they arise in the context of belief in God and knowledge of his character because God is righteous and shows himself holy by his righteousness (Isaiah 5:6) and that his people too must be righteous.”<sup>42</sup>

Jesus, the author of salvation and the teachings attached to such salvific endeavor lived a perfect life in conformity to the character of God and the demands God had made of his creatures. His teachings included, then, the great moral imperatives of Moses and became the standard by which Christians would be judged. Paul calls this the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21).<sup>43</sup>

In very specific terms when Paul was writing his first letter to Timothy, the following were outlined: That, if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer (leader) he desires a noble task... the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders amongst others (1Timothy 3:1-7).

In 1Timothy 6:3-10 Paul specifically mentions that, if anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, and malicious talk, evil suspicious and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness is contentment in great pain; people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that purge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith.

From all indications the basic ideals, attitudes morals and values of Christian leaders regarding integrity have been tabled. This is a pointer to some degree of the spiritual qualification of the kingdom of Christ, equivalent of Peter's reference to Christians as a "holy priesthood" or a "royal Priesthood" (I Peter 2: 5, 9; cf Revelation 1:6:5:10;20:6) where the apostle clearly discerned the connection between the type and the antitype.<sup>44</sup>

### **Recommendations**

- (i) The Christian minister should not be an agent of Christ in teaching only. He should be part and parcel of the message in actions knowing full well of the end result.
- (ii) The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should not concern herself with ecumenical responsibility and propagating the message only, but efforts be made to eliminate "Quack ministers" in Nigeria. It should align herself with other African Christian bodies and the world at large to curb ministerial excesses. In the same vein the headquarters of CAN should setup a monitoring task force to watch, study and recommend punitive measures on erring members at least within their area of jurisdiction. Where they cannot have direct influence, they support the government to flush out such ministers.
- (iii) Individual Christians should not hesitate to report such irreligious practices to the government to check erring men of God. Our duty as Christians also lies in safe-guarding our communities politically, economically, socially, culturally and religiously.
- (iv) The government herself should sit up through its law-enforcement agents to curb such excesses among the clergy. Members of the law enforcement agents who indulge in benefitting from such persons should equally be brought to book together with their collaborators.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, the authors have shown that, integrity is the key moral substratum on which the clergy and by extension all Christians

must stand to achieve honesty, trustworthiness, kindness, goodness and above all be real Christians. Here, both the Old and New Testament have provided Christians with numerous biblical standards to practice integrity namely, fulfilment of God's standards (Jer. 28:9, 16-17); strict harmony between claimed religious experiences and his moral life; holiness; and obedience to sacrament. Above all, clerics must live a complete moral life because Jesus himself lived a perfect integrity life in conformity to the character of God.

Clerics and Christians in Nigeria must therefore live up to expectation by eliminating their moral execs of lack of integrity in their Christian life. Christianity, it must be pointed out if practiced with integrity will go a long way in making it a catalyst in solving the problems of the country other than the provision of effective potentials for moral and spiritual rejuvenation.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>4</sup> S. U. Ngewa, "*The Gospel of John*", 57.
- <sup>5</sup> S. U. Ngewa, "*The Gospel of John*", 57
- <sup>6</sup> S. U. Ngewa, "*The Gospel of John*", 57
- <sup>7</sup> O. P. Oke, "Curbing the menace of Corruption for good governance: the Role of Religious Leaders", in *Religion and Governance in Nigeria*, eds. J. K. Ayantayo, O. A. Dada and H. A. Labeodan (Ibadan: Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, 2012), 92.
- <sup>8</sup> D. Ude Asue, "*Your God is my Devil*", 94.
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