

The Church, Integrity and Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

There is a growing belief in society today that the church which is supposed to be a place of acquiring moral integrity and discipline, has degenerated in integrity and moral values such that Christians who ought to be keepers and lovers of one another are now suspicious of one another. Scholars have written on the church, integrity and good governance in Nigeria but failed to relate it to Nehemiah's perception of integrity in governance and as applicable to Christians in government in Nigeria. The paper examines Nehemiah's servant leadership and its implications for integrity in the church and its consequences for good governance in Nigeria. There is a need to interrogate why Christians in government in Nigeria have not been able to bring to bear, good governance into Nigeria political terrain unlike Nehemiah and the early apostles. This paper focuses on Christian leaders, Christians holding in trust positions of authority. The paper adopts the documentation method and content analysis method in gathering and analysing data, respectively. The paper argues that the spate of corruption, moral decadence and other social vices in society today, are pointers to the fact that the church is lacking integrity and is morally bankrupt. The paper recommends that Christians

and church leaders need to step up on issues of integrity and moral values to ensure good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Church, Integrity, Christians, Good governance, Nehemiah's servant leadership

Introduction

Christian's ethical standards and morals are built around its core beliefs and core values. People expect Christians to operate with a high degree of integrity, and they respect people who live up to their ethics of Christianity. Once people become aware that one is a Christian or a missionary or a volunteer for a Christian organisation, they will generally expect integrity and honesty. It is expected that Christians have high moral principles and that they strive to uphold them. It was discovered through interactions with people that they often expect an even higher standard of integrity from Christians than they do from other people. It was acknowledged that Christians are flawed beings, weak vessels through which the Lord works, yet society expects Christians to be a living example of their faith and is disappointed when they do not meet these expectations.

There is a growing belief in the society today that the church which is supposed to be a place of acquiring morals, integrity and discipline, has degenerated in integrity and moral values such that Christ-followers and ardent believers who ought to be keepers and lovers of one another are now suspicious of one another. The situation has gone so bad to the extent that what is mostly read and heard about the church today gives causes for alarm. There have been reported situations whereby church leaders sponsored armed robbers and kidnapers and many other heinous crimes even against themselves or their acquaintances for lack of integrity. The Church is seen and accepted to be one institution where one goes to acquire good knowledge, morals, values and other behavioural modifications to build up integrity for the betterment of self and the society. Today, the situation has changed such that the church that was meant to influence and impact positively on the world, is now being influenced by the world system negatively. In the word of Catholic Bishop Father Kukah "the world has become so churchy, while the

Church has become so worldly." This buttresses the researcher's view and that of some other scholars. Most of the vices that were hitherto alien to the church are now being perpetrated in the church. The integrity of the church has received serious batching from both within and without. Many scholars such as Egbu posits that, based on the attitudes of some church leaders, the confidence reposed on the church has been eroded, as most people no longer regard their leaders' opinion. Hence it is difficult for the church to command the respect and honour it deserves within the society even among the adherence of Christian faith due to integrity deficit. There were reported cases of church leaders simulating problems to extort money or cover up some atrocities committed. One of such cases was the case of the Methodist priest in Akure, Ondo State in 2019 who arranged with some people to kidnap him to collect ransom from his church members, whereas he was lodged in a hotel. Because of the above and many other ills, being perpetrated by some church leaders, the church seems to have lost its integrity, even though there are still some credible ones amongst them. The church has almost lost its position as the voice of the voiceless masses and consequently has almost not been able to play one of its noble roles as a major factor in influencing the governance of the nation to enhance rapid development and catch up with the global world.

Definition of terms

For a clear understanding of the above subject matter, this paper will attempt a brief definition of some keywords that surface in the cause of researching the work.

1. Church.

Oxford Dictionary defines the church as a group of people who follow the same Christian religious beliefs, local or general¹. For a working definition in this paper, Church could be defined as the group of people that come together for a common interest especially with the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the saviour and the Lord through the preaching and teachings of the gospel of Christ. The common interest made them gather in any place which is always the church building or the house of God, where they are being provided with the opportunity for salvation,

socialisation, worship and also serves as an agent of change in the society for peaceful coexistence.

2. Integrity.

The dictionary defines integrity as “the state of being complete, unified.” When I have integrity, my words and my deeds match up. I am who I am, no matter where I am or who I am with. Integrity is not based or measured by good conduct rather it is cultivated and born in the heart. It is taught but it is caught as an inner personal conviction. It is expected to be an attitude of Jesus Christ followers called Christians which makes up the Church. Most scholars seem to agree on this definition of integrity.

Flynn posits that integrity is complete honesty in any situation, to determine what is right and wrong. Right even transcends the violation of regulations. You must oppose what is wrong and support what is right even if it costs you your life or your career. In other words, integrity means more to the professional officer than the dictionary definition. It means honesty, truthfulness, reliability, impartiality, sincerity, open-mindedness, trustworthiness, and courage. It means total ethical behaviour at all times and in all situations, regardless of the consequences. It cannot be turned on and off as desired; it is the focus of the professional's life.²

The Nexus between Integrity and Good Governance in the Nigerian Context

The success and development of any society depend largely on the integrity of her leaders. Over the past several of the studies, many documented evidence has proven of unethical behaviour in organisations and societies. The lack of morality and ethics by leaders and the led in the society and organisations will result in a lack of security and credibility³. The high level of corruption currently being witnessed in Nigeria society gives cause for alarm. Some of the culprits are Christians and as such, one begins to ask questions such as where is the integrity expected from the Church. Lack of integrity was responsible for leaders diverting public funds and properties which they have sworn to an oath of allegiance to protect.

The fight against corruption in Nigeria ought to be the fight for the soul and survival of Nigeria. Like cancer. Corruption has almost brought

Nigeria to its knees. It is time for church leaders, individuals and institutions, to be an active participants in the fight. The Church is an important influential institution in our society should be a role model. Nigerians main problems are moral, ethical and attitudinal failure and disorientation as posits by Ajayisegun.⁴ An employee that acts without integrity will cause the organization's reputation damaged and both customers and employees a tragic loss, just as a nation that is being led by leaders that lack integrity will end up in the tragedy of corruption that will open up doors for many other calamities as is the case with Nigeria today. The behaviour and performance of leaders were assumed to affect other people and organisations. According to Cheney⁵, organisations that have conducted an ethical orientation will witness an improved reputation. Generally, most theories and empirical research have attributed unethical behaviour to situational variables associated with the organisation, characteristics of the individuals, or the interaction between these two factors⁶. Following this, ethics and integrity also became a research focus, and specifically the relationship between a contributing individual's prosperity and the collective good. Dehspande, also argued that ethical policies in an organisation and ethical behaviour of employees and management within an organisation are two different concepts; yet, they do influence each other; the same way this paper submits that Christians' integrity and corruption influence each other.

According to Peterson,⁷ the degree to which a person believes in universal morals is influenced by how are the situational variables are. That is, some individuals may believe that certain acts such as bribes, unfaithfulness, are always wrong. However, the other individuals may reject the concept that there are universal moral rules and assume that what makes up ethical behaviour depends on the situation of the behaviour. One of the possibilities of this is that people are different, in terms of their degree of belief in universal moral rules, and the belief that is related to ethics. It is behoved then on the church to impart on the Christ adherent the change that is required through its moral teachings those ideals of good Christian values.

There are a lot of high profile cases of corruption involving Christians who are expected to be above board that are under prosecution while many others are under investigation by both the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (E.F.C.C), and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (I.C.P.C.). Many others have been convicted as we read on news media. Unfortunately, some of these culprits are still celebrated by the church despite the question marks on their integrity and moral bankruptcy.

The Church must use its power to teach the right values. One of our major problems is the breakdown of our values system. The Church, as an agent of socialization, must be at the forefront of rebuilding our value system and making the individual imbibe these values and moral principles. As part of its evangelical and spiritual mandates, the Church must boldly speak against corruption in society. The Church must take to the high moral ground and speak against corrupt leadership and poor governance.

Biblical Concept of Integrity

Many scriptural texts attest to the fact that God has concepts he expects from a man in this paper the church which is essentially the Christians. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, Jesus Christ set the pace even at the point of death. He knew he was going to die, yet he went into Jerusalem despite the advice of his disciples not to do so. (Mark 8:33). In Psalms 24:3-4 and 101: 7 RSV) respectively, it is recorded that;

“And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If thou wilt give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the LORD's, and I will offer him up for a burnt offering." So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. And he smote them from Aroer to the neighbourhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abelkeramim, with a very great slaughter. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel. Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; she was his only

child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And when he saw her, he rent his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me; for I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I cannot take back my vow." And she said to him, "My father, if you have opened your mouth to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone forth from your mouth, now that the LORD has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites."(Judges 11:30-36 RSV)"

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. "No man who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no man who utters lies shall continue in my presence." (Psalm 101:7 RSV). Integrity is not a virtue of God neither is it an attribute of God rather it is an attitude and nature of God. God wants man to cultivate integrity as a nature⁸. Jesus Christ in his human nature demonstrated integrity in all his public life. Christ gave birth to the church that produces Christians.

From the passage below, one can see a clear demonstration of integrity by Jephthah. This is what is expected of every Christian leader in both public and private positions. It was a painful decision to kill your only child when you have an opportunity to change your mind like some Christians will do today. For the sake of integrity, he chose not to do otherwise. This is a moral lesson for all the Christians and leaders in Nigeria in particular and World leaders at large.

Jephthah could have changed his mind considering the pain and the irreparable loss he will suffer by killing the only child. Many today would spare the child and begin to cry to God for forgiveness. Also in the story of the Acts of the Apostles, (4:35-36; 5:3-10) concerning Ananias and Sapphira, the husband was killed for keeping back the proceed of his property which he voluntarily promised to submit for the general use of the people and his wife was also killed for being an accomplice, was a clear proof that God frowns and abhors Christians that lack integrity.

Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Hark, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. (RSV)

The concept of integrity has played a key role in moral philosophy throughout history and is promoted in all societies because of its importance to social relations⁹. Individual integrity is vital to society, as the kind of society that is likely to be more conducive to integrity, is one that enables people to develop and make use of their capacity for critical reflection, one which does not force people to take up particular roles because of their sex or race or any other reason, and one which does not encourage individuals to betray each other either to escape prison or to advance their career. Providing things honest in the eyes of all men is a foundational building block for integrity, and fulfilling our societal or civic duties. In Luke gospel, Jesus sets the pace regarding our civic responsibilities.

They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God following the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?" Jesus responded by saying; "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. (Luke 20:22 RSV)"

Besides, societies can be favourable to the development of individual integrity. Society expects and requires the integrity of its leaders for the economic and development of such a Society. A person of integrity insists on doing what is right at all times, not only when he knows that a superior or subordinate is watching him nor when it is convenient for him. Duggar posited that "It is the courage to complete a bombing run when one knows full well that the chance for survival is poor or non-existent or the courage to admit failure rather than alter a report¹⁰".

The Church and Integrity a Panacea for Good Governance in Nigeria

The word *Integrity* comes from the same Latin root as *integer* and implies a wholeness of a person. Just as we would talk about a whole number, so also we can talk about a whole person who is undivided. A person of integrity is living rightly, not divided, nor being a different person in different circumstances. A person of integrity is the same person in private that he or she is in public. Integrity, therefore, not only implies un-dividedness but also means moral purity as exemplified in Matthew 5:8 RSV.

People with integrity do not seek to please men but to please God. Many scriptures talks of the "integrity of the upright" and thus demands that we adhere to God's will and God's laws. The church has to obey God's absolute commands in their lives and become men and women of integrity; as this will consequently engender peace and tranquillity which is a product of good governance in the society. This paper examines the biblical implication of corruption concerning church and integrity in Nigeria. The paper also examines the theological implication of the book of Acts of the Apostles (Acts. 5:3-10); a lesson to Nigeria Christians in leadership positions and in politics. Plumptre & Graham¹¹ argued, that

Governance is concerned with how power is exercised among the different sectors of the society. Dear author, we are not receiving papers now. We will only do business with papers presented at the conference after the conference. Please, send your abstract for the conference as an attached document. Please, ensure that the title of your paper to be presented at the conference is in tandem with the conference theme (REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTIANITY AND NEW MEANS OF GRACE IN A POST-PANDEMIC ERA IN AFRICA). Papers that do not align with the conference theme will not be processed for publication. You may see the conference flier sent to your institution. Also, ensure that your abstract agrees with the style of our association. Please, see the attached sample with this email. Always put a note along with your email. Don't just send a document without a note attached in the email. I will be expecting your reformulated abstract. Shalom!

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+234 803 512 2963r interests in the society such that traditional freedoms may be enjoyed with socio-economic and socio-cultural activities enhanced. This paper agrees with the scholars' views that governance is important, in that it provides the context for things that in history demonstrate people value; personal liberty and freedom, within the framework of the rule of law. In all ramifications, the system in operation in Nigeria currently does not guarantee the above positions. Adesida¹² and Graham¹³, also posits that good governance is the judicious and effective exercise of power to improve the quality of life of the people. Hence governance and power are interwoven as these are some of the ideals of the Christian faith but unfortunately, most Christians in Nigeria for the sake of integrity abnegates themselves from seeking political offices with the erroneous belief that politics is a dirty game¹⁴.

“Integrity is not what we do as much as whom we are. And who we are, in turn, determines what we do. Our system of values is so much a part

of us that we cannot separate it from ourselves. It becomes the navigating system of our lives.¹⁵

Integrity is about what we will not do, about what we will not give up, about what we stand for at all costs. Integrity is very much at the centre of who we are, and to lose it is to lose an essential part of our identity¹⁶. Integrity means "the quality or state of being complete or undivided" and indicates firm adherence to our values. Our values are ?/the things we hold dear, the things that are most important to us as we shape our lives. Living by them is integrity.

Integrity means being honest and truthful in every area of life. It is the decision and the choices that one makes, no matter the opposition and the odds one is confronted with. Integrity is standing up for the right thing always and at all times. Nehemiah brought integrity to bear in governance and position of authority. It is suggested that this was done to ensure good governance, to his subjects (Nehemiah 5:14-19).

Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens upon the people, and took from them food and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lord it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. I also held to the work on this wall, and acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

Moreover, there were at my table a hundred and fifty men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations which were about us. Now that which was prepared for one day was one ox and six choice sheep; fowls likewise were prepared for me, and every ten days skins of wine in abundance; yet with all this, I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the servitude was heavy upon this people. Remember

for my good, O my God, all that I have done for
this people. RSV

From the passages above, it was obvious that Nehemiah deprived himself of the paraphernalia of his office as a Governor to reduce the burden of running the office on the people of Judah. This is true should be a lesson to Nigerian leaders today, because of the current prevailing realities. In spite, some scholars posit that religion is not a panacea societal issues, aspect of it compliments and motivate development. It can also influence negatively. Just like Nehemiah, Christian leaders in Nigeria should chart a new course of high morals and integrity rather than engaging in personal aggrandisement of materials, unlike the early Apostles. The early apostles were an agent of advocacy, funding, innovation, empowerment, social movements and service delivery. This is at variance with the opinion of Alkire¹⁷ in his work Capacity and Poverty reduction, and also in Dimension of Human Development¹⁸.

Integrity is closely embedded with one's character. Therefore doing things honestly all the time will help in building good character. To be honest with the world outside, you must be honest with yourself first. Therefore it is important to develop your character by consistently doing the right things in every area of your life. Today, we find many Christians making tall promises which they will never adhere to. It is easy to make promises but it is very hard to keep them. If you are a person of integrity, you will ensure that you keep your promises and strive to do things properly. Every time you keep your word or promise, it reflects on your integrity and helps build up your character.

Your integrity is closely reflected in the way you value things around you. People who have a high level of integrity will do things properly as they are honest with themselves and strive to do things properly always. People who have a high level of integrity will attract the best people from different fields. People see your integrity and character, which further helps you becoming successful in every area of your life.

"Integrity is an often misunderstood value and that's the reason it is reasonable to ask whether it is always a moral value. It is an integral part of who we are and what stands for. It means to stand up for what you believe and dare to prosecute your conviction¹⁹."

Integrity relates to one's choice of action and consistency in application. When you are consistent in actions, there is only one you. You act with consistent principles wherever you are so people know what to expect. A person of integrity can be trusted, but trusted to do what?

Recommendations

In the process of researching this paper, the following findings were made; these informed the recommendations; that there are mixed multitudes in the church which comprises of three classes.

1. Most people that are called Christians in society are mere religious people playing religion just to belong to the church.
2. Another class is classified as churchgoers, this class also is seekers of bread, and they are only desperately looking for miracles and material blessings. This class also believes that if you cannot beat them, join them.
3. The class of genuine followers; is the class that seeks to be like Jesus Christ. They are the class that is ready to project the ideals of Christ Jesus like the early Church by holding to their integrity and the integrity of the church.
4. It was found that most people have lost hope in the church due to a lack of integrity.

This paper, therefore, recommends that for the church to reclaim its lost integrity: Firstly, there is a need for a total overhaul of the church's leadership concept and something must be done to stem the tide of the proliferation of denominations.

Secondly, there is also the need to go back to the early messages of the church that promotes Salvation and instils the fear of God in the hearts of ardent followers, rather than the 20th-century prosperity messages that have almost taken over the church.

Thirdly, emphasis should be placed on the preaching and teachings that centres on integrity and its virtues.

Lastly, any Christian that is caught in any act that is capable of betraying the Christian faith should be disciplined by the church.

Conclusion

Every day, Christians rub shoulders with people who are watching her in society. Her life should demonstrate to them whether Christianity is true or false. They make value judgments about believers by their attitudes and actions to justify their choices²⁰. Nigeria claim to be a nation that demands integrity, but does she? Nigerians want politicians to be honest, but don't expect them to be; perhaps because often they are not as honest as they should be. He says that Nigeria is a nation of laws, but often breaks some of those laws—like speed limits and jaywalking— and tries to justify their actions²¹.

Murray made a point that has been made powerfully recently by British philosopher John Gray. In a series of books over the last twenty years, he has attacked the myth of progress and the unthinking faith of secular humanism. "The return of religion as a pivotal factor in politics and war is one of the defining features of the age", he has written. "It is time, Paine, Marx and other secular prophets were gently shelved in the stacks ... the books that have most formed the past, and which are sure also to shape the future, are the central texts of the world religions²²."

In line with this view and some other scholars' view, this paper concludes that the place of church and integrity cannot be underestimated and neither can it be overemphasized in any society that wants to attain greatness, enjoy relative peace and progress and development. There is therefore the need for the church leaders to place more emphasis on teaching integrity so that Christians in every sphere of life can begin to influence their environment and the society at large more positively.

Corruption is very pervasive and at times not too glaring to the public. It is a systematic problem in our society and thus should be addressed systematically right from the root, stem and branches. To curb it, children, youth and adults must be given the power to distinguish between rights and wrongs. The church should return to the teaching of moral principles to empower adherents with the spirit of stewardship and high moral integrity. This will engender exemplary lives reflecting truth, kindness; healthy competition; dignity in labour; integrity and good governance in Nigeria.

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