
Full Length Research Paper

Religious perspective of corruption and development in Nigeria

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This work examined the religious perspective of corruption and development in Nigeria. Religion permeates the life of every human being as well as every society throughout the world, and every religion has norms, values and acceptable standards reflected in its doctrine. By inculcating in adherents these norms and values, religion is expected to promote social control and acceptable standards in the society, thereby reducing vices such as corruption. Thus religion and corruption are seen as having a symbiotic relationship. Using the Christian religion, this work argues that the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria is an indication that the Christian religion is failing and is losing its potency to correct the vices in the society and as such, has undermined the fundamentals of a global ethics necessary for the modern Nation like Nigeria and her development. Using the phenomenological method of analysing social issues, the work concludes that Christianity is not doing enough in its function to combat corruption and recommends that religious leaders and adherents of the Christian religion have a greater role to play if the fight against corruption in Nigeria must be successful for her growth and sustainability of development.

Key words: Religion, corruption, Christianity and development.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of religion borders on man's relationship with an expression of ideas about the divine. The system of beliefs and practices associated with religion usually draw the adherents into a Nigerian community. Religion exhibits a tremendous social force that cannot be safely ignored. In some societies, religion determines the social values, structure, stratification and developments. Powerful as religion is in social development, there are always horrific consequences of conflicts related to religion. Religion permeates every facet of the life of the adherents and has great power to help or to hurt. The various dimensions of religion have both healthy and unhealthy aspects. The part of a religion that helps people to be disciplined and productive, responsible and open-minded portrays the healthy side. When adherents

of religion exhibit corrupt tendencies, unhealthy consequences emerge.

History is even more pitiable. People go to the refuse dump to fill their emptiness, and such painful search for meaning ends in an uneventful habit of bizarre taste, laxity, promiscuity and complacency. Thus, their predicaments; the experience so far is very much tragic and traumatic in the presence of a blinking future. 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. In fact, it is a well-known problem that one of the factors that have hindered Nigeria from development is the incessant occurring of religious and corrupt practices (Tonybancy, 2015).

This paper examined the issue of “Religious Perspective of Corruption and Development in Nigeria,” by tracing the bearing of the spear cast by the contemporary age of secularism on the vision of Nigerians with the particular cases of bribery, prostitution, embezzlement, abuse of power and greed etc., with the mind of clearing the web and mess blunting a proper focus of ideas so that individuals may come to know where they are and where they should be if Nigeria must be developed. The objective of this work is to showcase the fact that the Christian religion is not doing enough in its function to combat corruption in Nigeria and will proffer ways on how this vice can be reduced in the Nigerian community for sustainable development. The researcher made use of the phenomenological approach and also employed the use of secondary sources such as books, journals and so on.

Religion, Corruption, Christianity and Development Defined

Scholars find it difficult to frame a definition that will include every aspect of religion, past and present. From an analysis of religion, as soon as people begin to discuss whatever is to them “religion” the tendency will be to end up invariably with a moral consciousness and commitment to whatever they find themselves believing. But religion invariably extends to the external and secular expressions which involve such disciplines as Philosophy, Psychology, Anthropology, History, Geography, and Sociology which come under the aspect of the phenomenology of Religion. This indeed is in recognition of what of course should be the general nature in the matter of what people regard as “Religion,” so also in the study of religious science, a measure of commitment to the truths of transcendental realities already claimed for religion (Ekarika, 2015).

According to Umoh (2010) “Religion is more than simply a belief in a transcendent deity or a means to an afterlife. It is, rather, an orientation to the cosmos and our role in it”. We understand religion in its broadest sense as a means whereby humans recognizing the limitations of phenomenal reality, undertake specific practices to effect self-transformation and community cohesion within a cosmological context. Religion thus refers to those cosmological stories, symbol, systems, ritual practices, ethical norms, historical processes, and institutional structures that transmit a view of the human as embedded in a world of meaning and responsibility, transformation and celebration. Thus, it is Religion that connects humans with a divine presence, with the human community and with the broader earth community, it links humans to the larger matrix of mystery in which life arises, unfolds and flourishes.

Moreso, the term also refers to faith in a divinely created order of the world, agreement with which is the means of salvation for a community and thus for each individual who has a role in that community. In this sense, the term applies principally to such systems as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which involve faith in a creed, obedience to a moral code set down in Sacred Scriptures, and participation in common practices. In its most specific sense, the term religion refers to the way of life of monastic or religious order (Richardson 1966, Encyclopaedia Encarta, 2005).

On the other hand, there are several definitions of corruption. One very common definition according to Mark and Ulrich (1999) says “corruption is the abuse of 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 shows how ethically explosive the issue is: “the undermining of the common wellbeing through particular interests of individuals”.

The Act establishing the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) 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. It involves the seeking or exacting of a promise or receipt of a gift or any other advantage by a public servant in consideration for the performance or omission of an act, 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 an antithesis of ethics and accountability. They 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 and so on. However, according to Ighodalo, (2009), while these factors cannot be overlooked, moral leadership and true commitment to the service of the nation are at the centre of the situation.

The concept of development has been so over-used that many people believe that they know its meaning though when they are asked to define it, one is shocked to discover that they do not know it. “Development” as Walter Rodney (1972) rightly observed, “is a many-sided process.” At the level of the individual, it implies

increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing... At the level of social groups, therefore, development implies increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships.

The full implication of the above characterization of development is that it is first and foremost mental before it is expressed in material equivalent. Genuine development is fundamental of human beings in terms of ideas which imbue in them the capacity to think-qualitatively and tackle the problems that emerge out of their living conditions.

Any phenomenon as complex and as vital as Christianity is easier to describe historically than to define logically, but such a description does yield some insights into its continuing elements and essential characteristics. One such element is the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ. That centrality is, in one way or another, a feature of all the historical varieties of Christian belief and practice. The ultimate principle of the universe, called by many different names in various religions, was called "Father" in the sayings of Jesus, and Christians, therefore, call Jesus himself "Son of God". At the very least, there was in his language and life an intimacy with God". At the very least, there was in his language and life an intimacy with God and an immediacy of access to God, as well as the promise that, through all that Christ was and did, his followers might share in the life of the Father in heaven and might themselves become children of God. Jesus crucifixion and resurrection, to which early Christians referred when they spoke about him as the one who had reconciled humanity to God, made the cross and chief focus of Christian faith and devotion and the principal symbol of the saving love of God the father.

This love is in the New Testament and in subsequent Christian doctrine, the most decisive among the attributes of God. Christians teach that God is almighty in dominion over all that is in heaven and on earth, righteous in judgment over good and evil, beyond time and space and change; but above all, they teach that "God is Love" (John 4: 16).

In Nigeria, Religion features at the beginning of the nation's constitution. Chapter 1, part II (10) prohibits the adoption of any religion as state religion and chapter iv (38) gives freedom to all citizens on the religion to practise and that no religion should be forced on any citizen against his will.

Most Nigerians are religious. They believe in the supremacy of God and that God is the basis of their individual and corporate lives. 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 practised it with fervour and passion. Recently, the spirit of "born againism" has taken over.

Churches are found in all nooks and crannies of the streets. Thus, churches in the forests, riversides, on hilltops and mountains. Crusades are everywhere. Worship sessions and vigils take place every minute of every day of the week. People go in large numbers on pilgrimage taking pride in being addressed as JPs or Alhaji. In the words of Ehusani (1998), 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 housewares are being turned to churches, sports stadia are being used more for religious functions than for sporting activities. Streets and highways are blocked at regular interval for religious meeting and crusades.

In an article that appeared in New York Times (Mach 13, 2002), the writer, one Norimitsu Onishi noted that "Christianity is growing faster in Sub-Saharan Africa than in any other place on earth. Roman Catholicism and the major Protestant denominations are gaining more followers every day, but new churches are leading the boom. Within this religious firmament, bishops, pastors, evangelists, faith healers, prophets and visionaries, are swelling in number and having a field day. In the last few years, a new dimension has also been added to the thriving religious enterprise. It is the increased patronage of high ranking public officials who not only openly call for and sponsor regular prayer sessions in different prayer houses, but have themselves become born again Christians and prayer merchants, often appearing at church crusades and prayer vigils with all the paraphernalia of public officer, and sometimes grabbing the microphone to deliver sanctimonious homilies and earth-shaking prayers.

These days, prayer and preaching sessions are no longer limited to churches, mosques and homes. They are also held at corporate boardrooms, in government offices, in commercial buses and in open markets. Nigerians going about their daily business can be seen brandishing the Bible or the Koran, the Rosary or Islamic prayer beads. The largest billboards in our towns and cities are those advertising upcoming religious crusades and faith healing carnivals. To Yusuf (2003), unfortunately, in most of these churches, holiness seems to be unpopular, as the vows of celibacy and life devoid of glitters have 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". Religious phrases such as praise God, "Hallelujah", Jesus is Lord", to God be the glory", "Praise the Lord", are often on the lips of Nigerians, at work or at play. Some establish their church and make themselves the General Overseer, their wives

(i)
(ii)
(iii)

deputy General Overseer or Treasurer, their son (the Secretary and so on. Some of these pastors now go about with armed bodyguards, bouncers and other official paraphernalia such as secretaries, personal assistants, protocol officers and others. There is perhaps no other nation in the modern world with as much religiosity as contemporary Nigeria.

With all these shows of religiosity or outward display of piety, one would have expected to see a very high degree of social morality in Nigeria, but this is not the situation, rather, there is an embarrassing contradiction between the high ethical demands of the Christian religion which the majority of Nigerians profess, and the phenomenon of corruption, greed has earned our country the unenviable status of the second most corrupt country in the world according to Transparency International's Year 2002 Corruption Perception Index which shows a list of countries since 1995 on how corruption is perceived in one particular country by the business circles, by the population and the international community. The index is based upon at least three surveys per country. Hence, the CPI is a very effective instrument (Pieth and Eigen, 1999).

Characteristics of Corruption

- (i) a means to obtain something;
- (ii) the hidden and intransparent nature of the 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;
- (ix) a breach of law with a disintegration of the sense of justice;

Different Forms and Motives of Corruption

- i.) The corruption of poverty- normally "petty corruption"- has its roots in poverty (e.g. when government officials do not receive a salary at all or not enough to sustain a sufficient livelihood.
- ii.) The corruption of power- normally "grand corruption"- rooted in the greed of more power, influence and wealth or in the safeguarding of the existing power and economic position.
- iii.) The corruption of procurement and the corruption of acceleration serves the purpose of obtaining goods and services that otherwise would not be available or

delivered on time, or only with much greater administrative expenses.

Types of Bribery

The scholars of Hanafi, divided bribery into 4 categories:

First, bribery did so that someone will be appointed as a judge or officials (just as a civil servant). The ruling of this category is forbidden for both sides.

Second, a judge who asks for bribery before deciding something. This type is forbidden for both sides, even though the decision is right and fair, since deciding for fair decision is the obligation of the judges.

Third, giving a certain amount of money to someone to prevent his tyranny or to gain benefits (by acquiring his rights). This type of bribery is forbidden to the bribed only.

Fourth, giving a certain amount of money to someone who helps the giver to gets his rights. Giving and receiving such money/property is permitted because the status of the money resembles wages.

Abuse of Power

Without any misgiving, Nigeria ranks high among nations where violence abounds due to misuse of power. It is like a resurgence of the Machiavellian political stance "might is right." Supporting any leader in authority to sustain itself perpetually in the office utilizing all means even to the detriments of the subjects.

Nigerians have witnessed enough callousness and brutality from her leaders, both political and religious. From history, our experience of leadership in Nigeria is repugnant and bizarre. For pride, our leaders have mortgaged our destiny and sold our rights for greediness. Since we live in the land of opposites, ministers become lords of the people while shepherds feed on the flock. What is more, revolution and opposition are completely not entertained. If you are against them, then you are in for it. Your lot cannot be less than assassination, exile and frustration. If you become a friend to their enemies, you are also very likely to pay a price. In this kind of a situation, how will Nigeria develop?

Many scholars are of the opinion that the low level of development in the country can be attributed to the lack of "responsible" leadership. Religion can play a vital role in correcting the poor orientation of the leaders and citizens. A good religious leader is capable of a high level of abstraction and this helps to create order in the midst of chaos. This is possible through the dispassionate analysis and synthesis of various ideas. As Utah (35) has stated:

The human experience is chaotic, complicated and sometimes intricate in character. Only a high level of abstraction could integrate the chaos of experience into a comprehensive and consistent world view.

The religionists are best suited to provide order to the chaos of experience and they can help to engender a new orientation by re-evaluating the issues dealing with what constitute reality, truth, and the values for Nigeria (ii). This re-evaluation is necessary because both leaders and citizens have failed to identify with national goals.

Prostitution

(iv)iii

In the Nigerian context, there is almost no distinction between what is sacred and profane. It is all promiscuity and pollution. Sexual perversion is present within (iii) married life where there is no fidelity, between the family head and maidservant, between a housewife and a driver. Professional prostitutes engage in this business for money, their bodies become commercial articles for sale. As the fallout from radical feminism, single parenthood produces in these children questionable paternity, like mother like daughter, the children then explore their handicapped situation eventuating in sexual frustration. These children lacked proper home upbringing. So they indulge in this business taking it as something normal.

Apart from disputed areas in the street corners, Nigerian secondary schools and tertiary institutions are the greatest shareholders in this enterprise. From home, children, especially girls who have less attention miserably adapt to this new situation as a way of coping with the daily needs and also to become identifiable among their mates. In this affair, women are always vulnerable. Even where society has infiltrated this distortion in their psychology. Ladies could still be helped without manipulating them as mere instruments of gratification. (vi)

Within the family, contraceptives have made sexual indulgence far less costly and far safer outside it than ever before opinions, less hostile to illicit unions ever (vii) sexual perversion than it has been since the traditional times. As it were, our warped natures, the devils who tempt us, and all the contemporary propaganda, combined to make us feel that the desires we (viii) resisting are so natural, so healthy and so reasonably, that it is almost perverse and abnormal to resist them. However, against such background, we must know (ix) every sane and civilised man must have some set of principles by which he chooses to reject some of his desires and to permit others. This is realizable if we accord reasonability its proper place in our assessment of values, else Nigeria's national development shall be distorted.

Functions of Religion

According to Henslin (2007), religion serves the following functions:

- i.) Provides answers to perplexing questions about ultimate meaning, such as the purpose of life, why people suffer, the existence of after-life etc.
- ii.) Provides emotional comfort especially during the time of illness, death, suffering and so on. (iii) Provides social solidarity, unites believers in a community that shares the same positive values.
- iii.) Provides a guideline for everyday life through rules and regulations on what to do and what to abstain from.
- iv.) Provides social control so that fairness and justice will be displayed.
- v.) Provides support for the government.

Having briefly reviewed the Nigerian situation, the question now is, is the Christian Religion really serving the purpose of increasing moral and spiritual values? The answer is that the Christian religion does not appear in serving these religious functions. Instances for this position abound.

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.

- (ii) Where virtues of criminals and fraudsters are extolled openly.

Religion is, unfortunately, providing negative support for the government as most government officials use it to abuse the collective conscience of the people through their deceits and manipulation.

Nigeria has been experiencing religious meltdown and not only has it failed to curb corruption, but it has in itself become a channel of corruption.

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 today popular religion in Nigeria has side-lined the cross and all the spiritual values associated with it.

Religion today declares all failure, suffering and pain as of the devil while associating with God only wealth, success, healing and prosperity.

In Nigeria, religion has lost its potency to fight the virus of corruption and not just this, corruption has succeeded in infesting and taking over the brain box of religion. According to Labanjo (1970), no one is asking for a country where all the citizens are saints, but it would not be any use either if all the citizens are sinners. The fact is that in every society the saints should redeem the sinners otherwise there would be chaos.

Corruption as an Obstacle to Development

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.

Negative Effects on Development

- i. Misdirection of development (wrong allocation of resources) in vital sectors of the society by not investing in areas of urgent economic, social and political need but by investing for example in public servants who may expect the highest bribes.
- ii. Increased indebtedment if investments in development projects do not yield the required economic benefit and thus aggravate the interest payments or the repayment of the debts.
- iii. Shortage of taxes and other national revenues for public tasks.
- iv. Tax evasion. i.
- v. Deterioration in quality (e.g. by falling short of standards). ii.
- vi. Increased risks to safety, health and environment (e.g. construction of bridges with cheaper material iiito compensate for the additional expenses due to corruption.
- vii. Economic inefficiency, by destroying investment values.
- viii. Increasing intransparency, attempting blackmailing and Mafioso dealings.
- ix. Loss of confidence in state and economy. iv.
- x. The weakening of moral integrity and credibility of persons and institutions etc. v.

Religion and Development

Ukeachusim et al. (2013) proposed that in religion, there is always a concern for mankind in his quest to discover God. Okweze (2012) making reference to the Christian church which also connotes religion documented that "through the centuries, the church would establish their presence together with the building of hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged and infirm..." In these

and many more, religion is presented as having a strong relationship with development. Furthermore, Yinger (1957) holds that religion seriously affects motivated decisions that have to do with scarce time, skills and resources which revolve around production and development. Thus, religion is so much related to sustainable developments in that, religion can influence the structure of work groups and situation.

Employees may be religiously motivated to develop a higher skill in their work and would always aim to improve the lives of people under its influence. On the other hand, religion can influence negatively as usually it is the poor that are the losers. The poor mostly suffer from the extremely high economic costs of corruption, from the show of force of small elites that sustain themselves with the corrupt funds they receive, they suffer from safety and health hazards of ecological or construction risk, from corrupt judges that are manipulating the laws. Frey Nakonz (2016). It is also assumed that women are more affected by the effects of corruption than men because corruption also serves to keep the existing power structures in place (access to land, property and offices) Akabogu (2014).

Recommendations

To fight this societal menace for our national development, the following programmes must be put in place by the ecumenical council.

- i.) Drawing 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.
- 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.
- ix.) On the part of the government, those in power must fear God and practise their religious obligations and

national duties sincerely. This will earn them moral support from the followers.

x.) There must be a vibrant national view centred on the fear of God, after all, swearing with the Bible is an indication of wearing individual and national conscience around religion.

xi.) Performance of duties must be seen as an opportunity to serve the nation and put national interest over and above individual interest.

xii.) Religious leaders need to wake up from their slumber and take the message of the cross more seriously.

xiii.) 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.

xiv.) Religious 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.

xv.) 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.

Conclusion

Clearly, the Christian religions 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. Religions, thus, need to be in conversation with other sectors for the adequate distribution of resources for national development. Kenneth (1969) 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 religions, humans are now advocating for restraint in the use of natural resources on which all life depends, equitable distribution of wealth, recognition of the responsibility of humans for the continuity of life into future generations. These are the virtues for sustainability, which the world's religions can contribute which in turn will assist in Nigeria's National Development.

From the issues discussed, it could 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. 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 religion failed 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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