

**IMPACT OF THE BIBLICAL AND TRADITIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE
LAW AND SIN ON THE CORRUPTIBLE THOUGHTS OF CONTEMPORARY
NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

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Abstract

Nigeria is predominantly considered as a religious society. Though Africans generally have been tagged a religious continent, but Nigeria seems to have outnumbered other African nations on the degree and growth of divergent attentions to religion. Her major religions are: African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. This paper anchors on African traditional religious culture and Christianity and their impact toward eradicating or reducing corruption to the barest minimum. The problem of the study remains that the Christians and traditionalists have devoted immense strength through their biblical and traditional perceptions of the law and sin to curb corruption in Nigeria to no avail. The paper discovers that corruption in Nigeria has taken the shape of an anthill that appears dried outwardly but very fresh and alive inside. The research aims at addressing the issues with the contemporary structure of corruption and its panacea. The paper adopts hermeneutical and sociological research approach. It is recommended among other things, that the legal contents in the biblical and traditional laws against sin should be built in Nigeria constitution. Data were selected from primary and secondary sources. Data collected were analyzed with phenomenological method of data analysis.

Keywords: Bible, Tradition, Law, Sin, and Corruption

Introduction

Law is always promulgated to tackle sin in the biblical point of view and abomination in the traditional religious view point. In the bible, the law within the premises of the Pentateuch is termed “the commandments”, or Decalogue while in African traditional religion, it is conceived as customs, norms, mores etc. In the secular world view the two variables are perceived as law/constitution/decrees, by-laws/acts and crimes respectively. In the New Testament part of the bible, Paul has stressed so much on law and sin in his letters to Romans, Galatians and other Pauline epistles. Galatians 5:19 – 21 points thus:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Sins are stated herein, with their stipulated consequences in the bible. The order given to adhere to avoid these sins is simply a law. In the New Testament, rules, laws, etc that stress against sins and their relevant consequences run across the Gospels, Pauline epistles, Acts of Apostles, letters of Peter, James, etc, In the Old Testament, the Book of Law – Torah (and Palestine Talmud) etc, lay warning against certain actions as sinful and contrary to the law with defined punishment.

In the traditional strand of thought, such laws and warnings are promulgated in form of laws of the land, customs and norms. Traditional leaders are the custodians of law, customs and norms in the traditional societies, there are various customs, norms, etc that serve as the legal code of conduct to the people, which are guided by the traditional leaders. Most of the actions concealed in the bible as sins are also given a similar frown look in the traditional customs, norms, etc. The problem now is, both ardent traditionalists and Christians appear to have exhausted strenuous efforts via their religious perceptions of the law and sin, yet no reasonable impact has been experienced or achieved against corruption in Nigeria. It is found in this research that corruption in Nigeria gets to alarming stages on daily basis. The paper is aimed at addressing issues associated with contemporary structure of corruption in the midst of Nigerians and the members of the two great religious faiths: Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The paper employs hermeneutical and sociological methodologies. It recommends that, the legal contents on the bible and traditional laws against sins should be built in Nigeria constitution, etc. Data were got from primary and secondary sources. Phenomenological style of data analysis was used to analyze available data.

Definition of Concept

In this research, the concepts that are defined include: Bible, Tradition, Law, Sin and Corruption. Bible is being defined by the common men mostly as religious document of the Christians. Ojoreh Prime defines bible as the collection of sacred writing of the Christians and their Religion, comprising the Old and New Testaments. For the Christians whatever that is directed to religion, spirituality and God is given explanation and interpretations with the bible as the most reliable authorities and sacred religious document. Biblical contents are the bases of Christian belief system.

Tradition in this research refers to African tradition. That is, the archaic ways of doing and understanding things in centuries back, in Africa and by Africans. Tradition is always older than culture, though the older culture forms a tradition. Longman Dictionary states that tradition is a belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time or these beliefs, customs etc. In general, tradition in African has preserved a lot of prohibited actions. At the same time, tradition preserved actions that are acceptable until the contemporary time.

Sin is generally conceived as actions that are rejected by the common man and divine order. Living stone in Ezeme (2011:31) perceives sin as: “The purposely disobedience of a creature to the known will of God”. Ezeme (2011) adds that: “The explanatory Catechism of Christian Doctrines defines this act as. “An offence against God by any thought, deed or omission against the law of God”.

In Christian view point, sins are committed through one’s thought (i.e thinking of something against God’s Law), taking some actions against law(s) or altering words that are against the God’s commands. Douglas (1977:1189) points to sin as: failure, error, iniquity, transgression, trespass, lawless, unrighteous... An unmitigated evil ... directed against God”. Sin is obvious in every religious setting but the terms used vary among people of different religions cultures and traditional backgrounds. In the Christian bible, the Old Testament records that sin has its origin from the first man and woman in their weakness to resist the serpent against the laid rule given to the man (Adam) on the his possession of the garden of Edem. After encountering this weakness from Adam and Eve, God laid down some commandment to man as a guide to actualize sinlessness. These commandments are recorded in Exodus 20:1 – 17 thus:

1. I am the lord your God: you shall have no other god before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord’s day
4. Honor your father and your mother
5. You shall not kill

6. You shall not commit adultery
7. You shall not steal
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods

These commandments give the Christians a laid down guide to be in peace with God in a documented hard copy. In the case of Africa tradition, such solid and written structure of laid down guides are not provided for the votaries, rather than their guides are provided through oral tradition and man's consciousness.

Corruption on the other hand has become a common phenomena in Nigeria. Summers (2001:306) have examined corruption thus: "dishonest, illegal or immoral behaviour, especially from someone with power". Corruption is more or less, commonly linked persons with power. Power is not limited to political power. Nwankwo (1992) has classified power into: Political Power, Normative, Economic Power, and personal Physical Power. He further classify power into potential (Stored) power and actual (effective) power. The truth remains that the most obvious area or type of power where corruption is a common place is in political power. Igbo and Anugwom state thus:

Political Corruption is one of the problems that have emerged as a result of social change in Nigeria. Political corruption refers essentially to the fraudulent conversion of public funds for private ends. It also includes; all manner of inducements and bribes offered to public officers in order to gain favours from them or to influence their judgement over issues that affect the individual concerned.

It appears obvious, that political corruption is the major aspect of corruption that negatively affects the welfare of Nigeria amidst other aspects of corruption that run across different areas of human endeavour in Nigeria.

Odey (2001: 8 – 9) views corruption as far back as 1960 thus:

Abubakar Tafawa Belewa's regime did not see it until the military struck in 1966. Yakubu Gowon did not see it either until he was removed from office. Murtala Mohammed saw it, tried to do something about it. But they killed him before he could succeed. Obasanjo himself did not feel the punch of it when he ruled Nigeria first. Today corruption is his abarross. Muhammadu Buhari saw it as great threat to Nigeria. He tried to do something about it, but failed partly because fighting corruption in Nigeria is not an easy task and partly because Ibrahim Babangida who ousted his regime felt that Nigeria could not live without corruption.

It could be difficult to sweep corruption out from Nigeria completely because it has gone so deep in the country's bone marrow and has created much damages to the important tissues of the society's whole being. But, there is still the belief that at least, a reasonable level of control could be gotten by paying attention to the will of God. This creates the background at which this research anchors on biblical and traditional perceptions of law and sin as other options in controlling corruption to a reasonable degree in Nigeria presently. Ugwu (2002:16) adds that: "The Nigerian society is in a very serious state of moral, social, political, economic, legal and educational decay. Corruption has been defined as behaviour, which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private regarding influence". This deviation of behaviour from formal duties of a public to private influence role has gone across, social (education, legal), religious (moral), political and economic spheres of the nation's affairs. The article therefore, examines the relevance or impact of biblical and traditional conceptions of law and sin in controlling the corruptible thoughts of contemporary Nigerians lives on the areas of social, political, religious and economic wellbeing of Nigerians. The commandments and their corresponding traditional laws, customs and norms are to address the current waves of corruption in Nigeria.

Impact of Biblical and Traditional Perception of Law and Sin in Controlling Corruptible thoughts on the socio – political lives of contemporary Nigerian Society

It is factual to emphasize that any deviation from these laid down laws of both Christian bible and African tradition is automatically termed "a sin". Though sins could not be conceived at the same level and gravity. In the secular legal units offences are not placed equal likewise their accruing penalties and punishments. In the Roman Catholic doctrine, sins are grouped into forgivable and deadly punishable sins. For example, in the Court of Law in Nigeria, the punishment for murder case and that of pilfering are not the same. In African tradition, all sins and offences are not judged as equal, likewise their punishments, forgiveness and warnings. The Ten Commandments are contained in the Old Testament, these Ten Commandments gives and access to the development of more laws in the New Testament.

On the social relationships, some laws are found in the New Testament addressing issues on relationship among individuals. Schmidtleicher (2003:56) emphasizes on the law of the husband found in Romans 7:2 is narrow use of the Law of Moses as it affects marriage thus:

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has domination over a man as long as he lives. For the woman who has a

husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies she is released from the law of her husband.

The law is linked with contents of Exodus 20:14. That is the sixth commandment which says: “You shall not commit adultery” in Ephesians 5:21 – 25 the law continues thus:

...And be subject to none another to the fear of Christ wives be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church.... But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her.

On the political sphere, Graham (2020:2) has used some New Testament verses to refer to the biblical law guiding individuals’ relationships with people in political power thus:

Scripture tells us to honour the emperor (1 Pet. 2:13), to submit to authorities (Rom 13:1) and to do good to all people (Gal 6:10). This represents the bible’s basic stance on our relationship to authority. The Old Testament too confirms the rightness of submitting to proper authorities through its narratives. Throughout scripture, God also calls us to what is good and right (Deut 6:18). (1 Pet. 2:12). So, if someone in authority tells us to deny Jesus or act wickedly, we have to say, “We have to obey God rather than men” (Act 5: 29). Hence the martyrs died at the hands of Romans because they would not deny Jesus. Our obedience has certain set limits...

On the aspect of marriage, for example marital relationship between a husband and wife the bible has given out a law that should guide the couple. When this law is obeyed to the letter, there would be no need for litigations arising from marital issues which could metamorphose in lobbying and bribing judges or magistrates to pass judgement to favour a party’s interest or to pervert justice. At the same time, when a husband and his wife obey this marital law, they will live with mutual understanding, peace and unity. As children are being brought – up in this background, they are bound to emulate their parents, meanwhile, such parents will make it a point of duty to make sure that their children will not be misled by peers and other environmental factors. As it is to marriage, so, it is to other social affairs.

The bible also makes it clear that people in political powers should be obeyed. In the Old Testament certain prophets warned the kings against some wrong actions. In the New Testament, it is also clearly stated that obedience to authority should not transcend to denying Christ, by agreeing with people in authorities to be used as machineries to execute wicked action or plans. Political malpractices are executed by individual whom the government in power plans to use. Therefore, the biblical law says that it is a sin to

agree to be used for such purpose. If people follow the biblical laws on social and political relationships, corruption will naturally die in Nigeria. It is worthy to note that the bible says that we shall do good to all people (Gal 6:10). When people in authorities discover that the led obeys God more than man they will relent from planning evil that motivates corruption in Nigeria there by killing corruption in Nigeria.

The traditional political environment counters political corruption. Orji and Olali in Okafor (2020:248) refer to indigenous politics as:

..... Political arrangements whereby leaders are with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provision of their native laws and customs. The traditional leader are perceived to be the custodians of people's norms, customs and other cultural practices.....

This is the position of African tradition as regards traditional politics. If Nigerians abide by this traditional laws in instituting people in positions of authority men of proven track records will take charge of government, and corruption will just die off in Nigeria politics, because these men will not encourage corruption, they will follow the due process in every affair of the state.

On the social realm also, Ejikeme (2020:159) points thus:

Morality is the number one value cherished by the Igbo people. Igbo have a lot of morals that guide their society and help to checkmate the behaviour of people. However, respect for elders has gone into extinct. The children, youths and adults have a rule on how they should live they portray the Igbo culture. Children are told a lot of folktales during moonlight by the elders that depict humility, courage and obedience. Youths, through social organizations during initiation ceremonies, are guided with some norms that help them to live an honest and transparent life. The adults are penalized for their wrong doings. Masquerading serves as a social function bringing people together as ne during festivals.

Igbo tradition for example place morality at the fore front on the children up – bring in their social relationship. The adults are punished for the wrong actions without favour. Marriage life was highly organized that one rarely hears about martial disputes (Mr. Gabriel Ilo, personal communication, 14 April, 2022). As it is to the Igboland, so it is in other traditions of other ethnic groups in Nigeria particularly and Africa in general.

Social and political lives in African tradition existed without corruption until this recent time. If the tradition/traditional laws are obeyed in Nigeria, they will go far in eradicating the sin of corruption from Nigeria people's thought. The biblical ten commandments,

from the fourth law to the ninth see any deviation from them as a social a sin, they read thus:

Honor your father and mother

You shall not kill

You shall not commit adultery

You shall not steal

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor

You shall not covet your neighbors wife.

Traditions of Nigerians maintain that children should honor their parent or guardian. Nigeria traditions see stealing as deadly sin just as it is seen in the commandments. Yet the most common corruptible acts among Nigerians led by those in authorizes is stealing. Commissions like EFCC (Economics and Financial Crime Commission) and ICPC (Independence Corrupt Practices Commission) have been inaugurated, yet corruption increases every day. The fifth law says; You shall not kill. Today, people are killed on daily basis as against the constitution of the country. Insecurity is the highest problem facing Nigeria today. This insecurity problem has been suspected to be connected with politics. The eighth law states. “ You shall not bear false witness”. People bear false witnesses in Nigeria law courts, and they go free just to favour their ally or relation. The ninth law says: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. This is the major cause of divorce and separation in marriage in Nigeria. All these sin pointed out in the bible are have their counterparts in African tradition, as forbidden actions. In all, it could be agreed that compliance to biblical and traditional concept of law and sin in the conscience of Nigerians will go far to reduce social political corruptions to the barest minimum.

Significances of the Biblical and Traditional perception of law and sin in reducing Socio – Economic corruption in Nigeria today.

In the Nigeria tradition, there are sanctions for obedience and disobedience to the customs and norms embedded in the traditional of each ethnicity, community, village, kindred and family Akulue (2013:49) asserts that:

... there are occasions when individuals for one reason or the other, tend to behave in a socially unapproved manners. On the other hand, there are those who almost always strict to the norms and values approved by the society. To ensure social order and control, the society has various devices aimed at discouraging non – conformity and encouraging conformity. One of them is **Sanction**. The use of sanction is not limited to societal level only. It extends to every human group. Sanctions take various forms ranging from teasing ridicule, suspension of membership, expulsion from an organization to award of honour and prizes.

In Africa traditionally, customs and norms function as the laws of the land, non – conformity to these customs and norms is conceived as sin. Hence the traditional societies in Nigeria employ sanction and some other physical punishments as penalties, against such sins. In some communities, when one steals other persons belongings or properties, they are beaten and dragged round the communities in some occasions such robbers are taken round the communities and villages necked and are forced to carry the items stolen on their bodies as they move round the villages in the communities (Mr. Jude Chijioke, Personal Communication, 18 May 2022). People are treated in according with the regard to the traditional laws of the land.

In Nigeria, different ethnicities and geographical regions are known for divergent economic activities or technologies. Akulue (2013:70 – 71) asserts that:

The patterns of architecture, methods and tools for exploiting the resources in the environments, occupation and related skills are all function of the dominant occupation is fishing, the able – bodied men are usually boat building, Net Making, Swimming and Fishing. In the Northern parts of the country, people are skilled in leather work and farming. ... Certain areas are endowed with resources for weaving as in, Asio Akwuete, Cloth dying as in parts of West and North salt boiling as at Okposi and Uburu communities in Ebonyi State, gin distillation as in Rivers State, Raffia work as in parts of the North and so on.

All these economic activities among different ethnic groups and geographical zones have traditional laws inform of customs and norms guiding economic expertise for the security of the products and professions. Specific punishments are promulgated for offenders of these economic laws in the customs and norms. Related laws affecting economic relationship are stated in the biblical Ten Commandments where it is said that: “You shall not Steal” “You shall not covet your neighbour’s goods”. Nigerians as a people in different capacities as businessmen, trading, craftsmen, politicians, civil Servant etc. To covet neighbours goods is becoming a culture in Nigeria. There are economic corruptions virtually in every economic endeavour among Nigerians.

It could be ascertain here that if Nigerians, especially the Christians and traditionalists abide by the biblical laws against economics sins, and traditional laws, customs and norms against economic sins, the corruptible ideas in Nigerians psyche will vanish in no distance time. This will promote economic trust and activities in the nation foreign investors will be attracted to Nigeria. People responsible for provision of social amenities that will enhance economic practices will sit up since they will understand that they are crippling their neighbours goods by indirectly making the cost of production in the state expensive.

Biblical and traditional Perceptions of Law and Sin in Socio– religious corruption in the contemporary Nigeria.

Power in the view of Nwanwko (1992) is of many types including normative power. Normative power deals with the powers of the religious. For example; the priests, religious ministers, etc. In the first to third commandment in the bible, Christians are given laws guiding their relationship with God (Exodus 20: 1 – 6). For the love of earthly and material things in life, people in religious powers are perverting the laws contained in the first, second and third commandments. Some have started making money their God, calling the name of God in vain, and even run some private businesses on the Sabbath day in the camouflage of running church or religious programmes on the Sabbath day. Priests have been involved in immoral acts including sexual abuse and immoralities, and other religious irregularities. Some of the activities are related to the actions of Eli's house hold. Gaiya (2014:4) avers that:

The end of the reign of Eli and his family was the period when Samuel was called. God had rejected Eli's household, because of the following reasons: 1. They have proved themselves morally depraved 2. They are spiritually degraded. They were unworthy to lead people. The people of Israel regarded Samuel as a prophet of the Lord and he increasingly became recognized as a religious leader and judge.

These actions of Eli's family were against the commandments of God. It should serve as a reason to the present Nigerian priests Philemon 1:18 in Nweze (2015:25) states thus: "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account". This is an interceding assurance given to Philemon by Apostle Paul on behalf of Onesmus. This is an example of the expected behaviours expected from Christian ministers if both the religious leaders and the led should work in the light of the expected religious and spiritual principles to wipe religious corruption from Nigeria. Nkamai (2022:3) express the regulatory strength in Uloubu religious practice of Amasiri community thus:

... Both as a trade – religious activity and simultaneously presently as a social regulatory mechanism for the Amasiri people. It explores the religious underpinning and cultural practices in "Ulo ubu", as well as how it performs a regulatory function in relation to the marriage, justice, religious, economic and education sectors of the Amasiri community.

Among the regulatory functions of "Ulo Ubu" is regulation of religious activities of the members of the traditional society. Some traditional diviners, priests, medicine – men. etc do a lot of irregularities in mischarging their religious and spiritual duties against the customs and norms of the land. Mr. Ezeja Nnamchi (Personal Communication, 18 March

2022) stresses that some adherents of the traditional religion have died, as a result of the connections to immoral and irregular religious activities unveiling in divination. Sometimes, penalties for sins against the law of the land come divinely and nit from physical and human being in the society. This contributed to immense fear people have against traditional religion. Henceforth, if people (Nigerians) begin to fear and obey traditional laws as well as biblical laws to avoid sins and their accruing punishments, corruption will reduce to the barest minimum in Nigeria.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Obedient to both biblical and traditional laws is needed to shape and transform Nigeria out from the menace of corruption. Corruption has gone throughout all the spheres of human welfare in Nigeria. Nigeria is conceived globally as a religious state, yet most corruptible nation. Today insecurity in Nigeria is connected with politics and material interest. Measures have been adopted by government to control corruption to no avail.

This research, recommends and advocates that compliance to biblical and traditional perceptions of laws and sins can proffer a better solution than relying completely on law enforcement agencies and crime control commissions. It also recommends that the contents of the bible and traditional laws against sins should be built in Nigeria constitution. Proliferation of religious bodies should be controlled for ideal expected compliance to traditional and biblical laws. Nigeria will be better with adequate attention to biblical and traditional laws. Corruption should be better handled from human conscience than physical attacks as far as it affects Nigeria.

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Interview

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