

**Reality and Rhetoric: Nigeria Prays, Yet Private
Primitive Capital Accumulation Persists
Maximus N.O. Asogwa
Public Administration &
Local Government Studies
University of Nigeria
Nsukka**

Abstract

Nigeria's status as an oil producing nation with an enormous revenue generation capacity from other non-oil exports, woefully contrasts with the extreme poverty of her citizens and her decaying infrastructural and institutional development. This state of the nation has been attributed to pervasive corruption, lack of public accountability and the "capture" of public services and resources by the ruling elite. Recent disclosures, about large scale malfeasance in the past eight years illustrate the point being made. Incidentally, it is within this state of affairs that our leaders have found prayer as the solution to the problems. This paper contends that prayer, whether in the Christian, Muslim and African Traditional forms, is essential for human activities and existence. On the other hand, it argues that for the receipts of God's blessings, Nigeria must at least ensure that she makes deliberate effort to do God's will by judiciously using his gift for the good of all. It believes that corruption (the absence of transparency and accountability) is therefore largely to be blamed for the reversing fortunes of the economy and the concomitant deplorable, poverty-stricken situation of Nigerians. It therefore concludes that we have to go back to our viable value base and good governance system if the nation must move up with others in this competitive world of globalization. The combination of prayer with the above will certainly put Nigeria back in her deserved pride of place in the globe.

Introduction

Independent Nigeria has been grappling with the three –monsters of corruption, bad leadership and bad governance. This is not peculiar to Nigeria, but also akin to other less developed countries of the world, and sometimes, even to the developed ones. Specifically for Nigeria, experiences revealed that, she has learnt nothing from the past as the effect of poverty of leadership in government and corruption is on the increase. According to Catan and Chaffin (2003), corruption is the single greatest obstacle to economic and social development. Thus, the economic misfortune of Nigeria has always been seen as arising from the mismanagement of the country's resources by the political and bureaucratic (including the military) elites. Generally, this has been attributed to bad governance; and bad governance entails corruption and lack of accountability and transparency.

Nigeria as a nation is heavily endowed with both human and material resources that could have moved it to the level of a developed nation more than forty years ago. Unfortunately, after almost 50 years of attaining independence the low political and socio-economic development of the country persist even with the abundant material and human resources that it is blessed with. Thus, Nigeria's socio-economic and political problems, despite various solutions, seem insurmountable. It is still in doubt whether any nation on earth is as endowed as Nigeria. It becomes a thing of worry for rational minds, why a nation with such abundant blessings from God could be economically crippled, politically a toddler and socially incapacitated.

Every nation of the world professes solutions to its problems, just as Nigeria's hydra-headed problems have not in any way lacked, as far as proffered solutions

are concerned. The puzzle that remains unresolved to both Nigerians and indeed all keen observers from outside the shores is that the proffered solutions that have creditably succeeded in many countries remain obtuse as far as Nigeria's case is concerned. In other words, her economic, political and social problems have not got better despite solutions provided in terms of policies and /or implementation.

Despite all these solutions, Nigeria's problems have remained unsolved. The country is still grappling with the same problems she set out to alleviate more than four decades ago. At present, corruption and other unethical behaviours, have attained an all-time –high level, so much so that many consider them accepted country's ethos. This situation has continued despite the clatter and campaign against bribery and corruption, which are being fought against through the institutions of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC).

The government, especially during Obasanjo years seems lost of ideas. Thus, Nigerians became helpless and invariably hopeless. In such a situation “man”, according to The Vatican II Document (1988), looks to their different religions for an answer to the unresolved riddles of human experience. Sequel to this, Nigerians, in both their private and public dealings, sought divine intervention to their hydra-headed problems. Indeed, not a few (even the government) embraced this theistic option, by reclining to God for intervention, through prayers, with the belief that God in his infinite mercy, may intervene in the Nigerian situation.

The government of Yar'Adua, not quite long ago, had to take it to international level when, the Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, during a private visit to Rome on 3rd July 2008, where he had an audience with Pope Benedict XVI, called on religious leaders to continue to pray for Nigeria adding that without prayers, no country can achieve true greatness. According to him, the challenges facing Nigeria were unique to most developing societies and that with God's leadership; the country would achieve its vision of greatness. As he observed:

We have come to the Vatican for your prayers and advice, and President Umaru Musa Yaradua sends his warm felicitations. Mankind cannot achieve much without God. In Nigeria, we are committed to putting God first, because we strongly believe that the lofty visions we have in the country, including our Vision 2020 and the Seven Point Agenda can be achieved if we continue to recognize the place of God in our day to day activities (GBADEGESIN, 2008 p :4).

Incidentally, the Vice President added that Nigeria is still grappling with inadequate power supply, inadequate infrastructure, security problems and the Niger Delta crisis.

Implicit in the above is that with prayers, the poor political and socio-economic development of the country will be solved. Contrary to this extreme theistic view, some rational thinkers are of the strong opinion that a nation's success or failure depends solely on what the people through their leaders are able to make out of their opportunities given them. For this group, who are mainly philosophers and scientists, God has little or nothing to do in the affairs of man. Plato, for one, maintains that a nation's success or failure depends primarily on leadership. For him, unless philosophers become leaders and leaders become philosophers, try as they may, nations can never succeed. In order words, he considered philosophy (love of wisdom) as the short –cut to national prosperity and breakthrough. Political scientists

are of the view that a nation can only succeed if her leaders and citizens follow some set down principles like the rule of law, justice and fairness and so on. For these rational thinkers, prayer has next to nothing to contribute to the success or failure of a country's future. Extremist philosophers like Freidrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) hold the view that "God is dead", therefore, expression of believe and faith in God, for Neitzsche and atheists like him, is futile. Thus, man should fend for himself while on earth and should do away with the idea of religious faith as solution to the world problem.

But despite the views of these atheists, it must be noted that expression of belief in God or in the divinity is as old as mankind. Throughout history even to the present time, men have always expressed the awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the cause of nature and the event of human life (Vatican II, document *-nostra aetate*, 2). In line with this, Nwamadi (2000) avers that religious believe has sometimes led to detailed conclusion about nature and history.

The task before this paper is to prove that even though prayer is essential for human existence, it is definitely not the only panacea to the development problems of the country, because as Achunike (2007) noted, "God must be the object of our belief and not our ego wishes or selfish wants" (p. 90). The basic goal of this study, therefore, is to undertake a retrospective and prospective analysis of Nigeria's development strides vis-à-vis our effusive and fervent religious posturing. Our approach in the study is analytical, descriptive and evaluative.

Conceptual Clarification of the Term Prayer

Prayer is a process of making our requirement known to God. In other words, it is the outpouring of our hearts to God. It is a means by which we commune with God. Man through prayer expresses his quest for God. According to the The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1999), "prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God" (p. 461) But as observed by Ekwunife (2007), "This definition while rightly stressing the transcendent nature of God, glosses over His immensity and all-pervading presence of his creation" (p.6). That is why we often say that prayer is communion or dialogue with God. Prayer is an instinct and part of man's being and a fundamental fact of religion; and as succinctly declared by Ekwunife (2007):

In prayer, man expresses his total dependence on the supra-sensible transcendent Being and His agents. In prayer, man rises above his creativeness and immerses him /herself with faith in the invisible word of human experience. In prayer, the disturbed order of creation is restored for the religious man and peace reigns more. In prayer, the religious man not only affirms the reality of the supra-sensible word, but also expresses a faith-conviction that a temporal world is not fully meaningful without transcendence. Indeed, prayer makes religious man discover... that man's perfect rest can only be found in God (p. 6).

We have reproduced this long quotation because there is nothing more to add. We can therefore conclude, as Prof J.P.C Nzomiwu, did in his forward to Ekwunife's (2007) seminal work that prayer is a discussion with God; prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God and requesting of good things from him; it is communicating and conversing with the Ultimate. Again, the efficacy of prayer in the solution of man's problems was captured by Agada (2008) when he says that:

...God, in answer to prayer confers not only spiritual favours but at times interferes with the ordinary course of physical phenomena, so that, as a result, particular events happen otherwise than they should ... when we kneel down to pray, we do not always beg God to work miracles or that our lives shall experience constant extra-ordinary manifestation of His power. We only trust that God through His infinite knowledge and power, will in some-way best known to Him, bring about what we ask. Hence events shape themselves in response to our prayer (p.10).

Perhaps, that is why our leaders in positions of authority exhort us to pray for the nation, without appreciating the fact that God's blessings are not without conditions. This in line with the functional analysts, whose logic appears in the works of theologians and others who attribute the persistent political and socio-economic problems of Nigeria to either irreligiousness or misunderstanding of the positive role religion plays in society. The main logic of such theologians and philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques, Rousseau, Auguste Comte and Bellah is that religion provides a centre of devotion and enthusiasm that sustains the moral unity of a people and that neither the political system nor society at large can function properly or develop without this moral unity provided by religion (Lovin 1992). Our leaders along this line of thought have consistently reminded us of the power of prayers in the life of the nation.

The State of the National Economy

The crisis of the Nigerian economy is today the focus of a great deal of analytical and practical attention from social commentators, economists, development experts and even the World Bank and IMF. Indeed, the depth of the economic crisis and its general impact on the lives of citizens have made the problems and their possible solutions matters of widespread debate among the vast majority of citizens in different social strata in both urban and rural areas. This is so even when the Nigerian economy is supposed to be the second largest in sub-Saharan Africa, after South Africa. In view of its rich endowment of physical and human resources, the potential for the economy, to rank among the richest and most resilient and diversified in the developing world is undoubtedly high. Unfortunately, the economic indicators are not good. As has been noted by Anya (2008):"

One of the enduring paradoxes of the Nigerian economic system is that a nation richly endowed with natural resources should also be one of the poorest countries. Even seasoned economists have been hard put to offer credible and rational justification for this contradiction. (p. 11).

A sector by sector analysis shows that the agricultural sector is characterized, among others, by under capitalization which has led to low yields and declining output. For example, the sector's share of GDP was 64.1% and 47.6% in 1960 and 1970 respectively. This slumped to 30.8% in 1980 but rose to 40.4% in 2000. Unfortunately too, the aggregate index of agricultural production recorded a negative annual growth rate of 2.6% between 1970 and 1980. This rose to 3.6% in 1981 -1985, and later, 10% in 1986-90. However, it went down to all time low in the subsequent period of 1991-1999 (CBN, 2000).

Briefly, in the manufacturing sector, the story has been the same. The average amount growth in manufacturing fell from 13.0% in 1985-89 to 1.9% and 1.6% in

1995-98 and 1999-2001 respectively. This situation has been attributed to high transaction costs which results from the poor performance of utilities and other infrastructure. For example, in terms of electricity, the consumption level in relation to the volume of electricity generated shows that there was a considerable loss, ranging from 31.4% to 41.5% between 1980 and 1996, due to a multiplicity of generation and distribution problems. One negative effect of the poor performance of infrastructure is that it has raised the cost of production to a very high level because every firm has been forced to invest in such facilities, like generating plants.

Because of space constraints, we will not do a detailed analysis each of the facilities, but we would like to add that in terms of social infrastructure, health and education are the worst. For example, Nigeria is lagging behind in all the MDGs, which 191 countries including Nigeria, signed at the turn of the millennium in 2001. Nigeria's overall health system performance was ranked 187th by the WHO in 2000 among the 191 member states. The health indicators in Nigeria are currently worse than the average for sub-Saharan Africa. For example, IMR is 115 per 1000, while under 5 mortality rate is 205 per 1000.

What can be deduced from the above analysis is that overtime, particularly the last two decades of successive military dictatorships, including the last eight years of democratic rule, Nigerians have been subjected to the adverse effects of bad governance. The net effect of this is the continued state of under-development as exemplified by low rates of economic growth, mass poverty, distortion in the allocation of resources, weak production structures, technological backwardness, nepotism and ethnicity, political instability, a poor investment climate, lack of transparency and accountability, widespread corruption etc (Nduka, 2006; Utomi 2000).

Though, blessed with vast human and material resources, its per capita gross national product, which was as high as \$1,281.4 in 1980 precipitated to its lowest level of \$240.0 in 1992; \$250.0 in 1995 and \$270.0 in 1997 (almost as low as the 1992 figure) (Obadan and Odusola, 1999). As the CBN has reported, unemployment rate in Nigeria for ages, 15-64 years, is 5.30% at the end of 2006, which is an improvement on the 2005 record of 11.90%. Youth unemployment for age brackets 15-24 years was 14% in 2006, while under-employment rate for below 15 and over 64 years was 20.2% (Yishau, 2007).

Nigeria is therefore a paradox in national development as shown by the United Nation Development Programme's estimate that nine out of every 10 Nigerians live on a less than \$2 per day. Even the National Bureau of Statistics, which uses a relative measure of poverty, has 51 Cents per day; just as ADB says that 70% of Nigerians live on below \$1 per day. In this regard, Ayorinde and Uga's (1999) assertion is apt:

The tapping of the country's rich endowment of various resources has not culminated in improved living conditions for the majority of the people. This paradox is especially spectacular because a vast windfall of oil wealth produced such meager result. The country is groaning with problems and most of people remain poor (p. 320).

The resultant effect of this situation is feelings of deprivation. This is because "when livelihoods are threatened, a feeling of deprivation ensues. Such people are insecure" (Ibeanu, 2008:24). This is probably why Nigeria is experiencing militant activities, violence and general insecurity more than ever before

Nature of the Problem

In the light of the reviewed situation of the developmental challenges or fortunes of Nigeria, especially in the last twenty-eight years, we can move to explore the major causes of Nigerian under-development. One can appreciate from our earlier analysis that Nigeria, with abundant economic resources, has not only failed to raise her GDP and savings appreciably, but has been for decades, one of the poor and indebted nations in the World. For a review: Nigeria was rated the 26th poorest nation in the World and was rated 146 out of the 162 on the United Nation's Human Development Index. Also, the World Bank rated the country among the 157 countries with low income in 2006, while the Human Index for 2006 ranked the country 159 out of 171 countries. Thus, that Nigeria is classified among the poorest countries in the world should really invite more critical analysis, than the theistic or spiritual option being adapted by our leaders.

Past bitter experiences in Nigeria reveal that, we are yet to learn from the past, as the effect of poverty of leadership in governance and corruption soar by the day. A recurring issue in Nigeria's political formation in the post-colonial period is the monopolization of the political space by corrupt, self-conceited leaders. In Nigeria, corruption has remained a pervasive social phenomenon. Illicit misappropriation of privileges and opportunities in public and private sectors for personal aggrandizement, particularly those in positions of authority is *sine qua non* to Nigeria. Today, the economy is bereft of any significant improvement essentially because of a booming capital flight which is a reflection of the pervasive corruption in the polity. Corruption has continued to blossom not because of absence of relevant legislations to tackle the problem, but essentially due to the weakness of key public institutions and lack of political will to enforce the laws.

The most fundamental reasons, as far as this paper is concerned, are the lack of a viable value base, which is aided by the prebendal character of politics in Nigeria, which manifests in the spoils system and the patron-client relations entrenched in our values and beliefs (Joseph, 1990).

Why corruption thrives in Nigeria

Values make the nation. Values are veritable anchor either at the personal level or at the level of the nation-state. That is why Oguejiofor (2004) sees them "as something desirable... things we would like to aspire to, or the possession of which we admire or praise in other people" (p.10). Values are therefore, things which are desirable and worthy of esteem for their own sake, which when internalized become the road map to a future desirable end.

Unfortunately, negative values like acquisition of wealth and power by all available means, naked greed and dishonesty are all vices that have plagued the nation's leadership. Morality, which is the sense of right and wrong in human behaviour has been abandoned in our society. On this, Nduka (2006:59) concluded that:

...the weakest link in the chain of Nigerian development efforts remain the weak value base which adversely affects both our individual and collective attempts at development, including those of the "leaders" who are either born or selected or rigged into positions of leadership or assume the leadership of the country (p.59).

The poor values which our political leaders have are responsible for their life of wanton selfishness and greed, and loss of track of nature of the common good-the good things of the society as a whole. Thus, the nation's wealth, which is meant for all, has been selfishly appropriated by the political leaders. Wealth has become an end

in itself and the means to acquire it is no longer important provided it is acquired (Oguejiofor, 2004). So the transformation of our society from a virtuous society to this type of bad society was a process that gradually crept in.

Apart from authoritarianism, which was used during military rule to appropriate national resources to remain in power, an important non-coercive form of consolidating power has been to rely on patronage. For years, as was experienced in the past eight years of our democratic experiment, resources needed for effective, broad-scale development were drained away, among other reasons to support regime efforts to consolidate power, through the third term bid for Obasanjo and second term (for Governors and members of the National Assembly). To secure political incumbency, public benefits have been distributed and opportunities provided along political lines. Thus in their quest for self-preservation, state elites have dispensed government—controlled resources—jobs, licenses, contracts, credit to selected political allies as well as mediating access to economic opportunities in favour of close associates so as to enhance their hold over state power. Nigerian political leaders, almost since independence but especially the eight years of Olusegun Obasanjo administration, have continued to use the state and its resources to maintain themselves in power. In the words of Tangri (1999):

Patronage politics has been integral to post-colonial efforts to maintain political control in poor ethnically diverse peasant societies. Yet, although valuable in helping to consolidate ruling coalitions, the dynamics of patronage relations have proved economically highly damaging (p.11).

This means that patrimonialism has shaped the economic actions of top politicians. But as Sandbrook (1985) notes, patrimonialism is “potentially economically destructive” (p.19). This is evidenced in some corrupted cases shown below.

Some reported cases of corruption

The samples of corruption, as we report below, show that the political, judicial, economic education and business domains are filled with this social malady. The zero-sum approach of politicians and military dictators that ruled Nigeria since the ending of the civil war is shown by the following cases.

Obasanjo administration, set up two institutions to combat the scourge of corruption—the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC). Hopes were raised as the acts establishing them gave them powers to survey, investigate and apprehend suspects through the police and prosecute in the law courts. Disappointingly, the civilian administration for the eight years it held sway was bedeviled by all kinds of perjury and corruption. Some of them are bribes for budget approval by the National Assembly, Payment of millions of naira for ministerial confirmation by the legislators at Federal and State levels, classical cases of embezzlement and looting of public funds and excessive use of money during election campaigns. Specifically, the leadership of the National Assembly has been changing because of cases of corruption. For example, Evan Enwerem was impeached barely six months into the office. Late Okadigbo was found guilty by a seven-man committee for frivolously awarding contracts for Christmas gifts to the tune of N22.9 million. Senator Haruna Abubakar, his deputy was indicted for his spoils of N16.6million and an additional N32million to celebrate Sallah festival.

Monumental corruption manifested in Obasanjo’s third term bid. His co-ordinators offered huge sums of money to the members of the National Assembly and

the State Houses of Assembly as follow: N100million each to 109 Senators; N70 million each for the 360 members of the House of Representative and N50 million for each member of the State House of Assembly (Olurode, 2005).

Other cases are:

** Over N17.7 billion was recovered from the former Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mr Tafa Balogun by EFCC

** EFCC has maintained that 24 former Governors have corruptly enriched themselves with public funds.

** Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, former Governor of Bayelsa State starched away £1 million in his London home; £420,000 and £470,000 found in various accounts; has assets worth £10 billion; acquired N1billion shares in Bond Bank PLC and purchased Chelsea Hotel, Abuja for N2billion.

On-going investigations into the activities of the federal government in the last nine years, have uncovered losses of huge sums of money through fake contracts and other illegal transactions.

** The Christmas bonus scandal which led to the resignation of Prof. Adenike Grange (Health Minister) and Arch Gabriel Aduku (Minister of State) involved N300 million in unspent 2007 budget of the Ministry. Senator Iyabo Obasanjo got N10million Naira from the money (Ayorinde, 2008).

** The House of Representatives Committee on Power and Steel probe of \$16 billion spent on the energy sector by Obasanjo while in office without any contract executed and no visible improvement in the sector.

** The investigation into the telecommunication sector by the Committee on Aviation where Babalola Borishade and Femi-Kayode (two former ministers) who handled the N19.5 billion Aviation Intervention Fund where contracts were inflated and later never executed.

** The Senate Committee on Federal Capital Territory (FCT) discovered that N96.7billion was realized from the sale of FCT Houses under El-Rufai, of which N32 billion out of the amount could not be accounted for.

** The House Committee on Police Equipment Fund discovered that over N30 billion donated by Public and Private agencies for the police has been fraudulently diverted to other uses.

** The House Committee on Finance investigating remittances into the federation account revealed that only N1.36 trillion was paid into the federation account out of a revenue of N3.6 billion generated by some ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) between January 1, 2003 and March 31, 2007.

** The House of Representatives discovery that out of N2.4billion naira car deal with Peugeot assembly of Nigeria Limited, (PAN) that PAN did not adhere to the terms of the contract as it supplied 380 nos. of Peugeot 407 ST which costs N5.1 million naira each instead of the one the House ordered for with special features at N6.2 million each. The N2.5 million Bribe Scam against the House of Representative Committee on Privatization and Commercialisation by the Directors of Nigerdock Nigeria Plc where the members had demanded a gratification from the company when they visited it as part of their oversight functions (Adimboye and Agbaegbu 2008).

** Senate Ad hoc Committee on food crisis in a document titled "2008 Grain Release Beneficiaries" reveals that two Senators (Adamu Garba Talba from Yobe and Ibrahim Ida, from Katsina) got 120 tonnes, 5 traditional rulers from the North, including Etsu Nupe (120 tonnes) and the Emir of Biu in Borno State (60 tonnes), and the Emirs of Lafia, Daura and Katsina, all got 120 metric tonnes each. Meanwhile 19

Northern State governments including FCT got 36,000 tonnes; 17 Southern States got 10,200 metric tonnes (Agbaegbu and Mumuni 2008).

** The Oil Blocks Fraud, where 70% was cornered by Obasanjo and his cronies (Ajaero 2008).

Nigeria Prays: Prayer as a Solution

Is it not absurd that with the state of our socio-economic and political conditions seen earlier and the above cases of corrupt behaviours on the part of our leaders that the same leaders enjoin us to pray for the nation? Having failed to make the country develop along the political, economic and other axis, our fraudulent leaders have now turned their attention to religion, both orthodox and unorthodox. Thus, “the cures for our thousand and one societal ills from political, economic, medical to moral and other shortcomings are believed to reside in religion” (Nduka, 2006 p. 60).

This option for prayer as a solution to our countries problems indeed received no negligible acceptance, so much so that in all public functions prayer became part of the protocol to be observed. The case has been the same with federal, state and local government functions. Even the orthodox churches adopted some structured prayers for the ills of the nation. For example, with the annulment of the June 22, 1993 election, by President Babaginda, the Catholic Bishops, called an emergency meeting on July 2 at Enugu during which they composed a prayer aptly titled, *A Prayer for Nigeria in Distress*, this was recited by Catholics all over the country (Kukah, 2003). The Catholic Church sponsored other structured *Prayers — against Bribery and Corruption* and *Prayer for peaceful and Transparent Election* (2007). All these were recited by Catholics every Sunday.

Besides these prayers, the former head of state, Rtd General Gowon, organized what he tagged: *Prayer for the nation*, during which his group went round the country praying for the nation, these prayers were said with heightened devotion and unmitigated confidence in God’s ability to put Nigeria’s derailing history to the right track. In all these, we can appreciate that the challenges of social provisioning cannot be met by the politicians. That is why, they deceive the people by prescribing a dose of prayer in all official functions. For example, recently, (in June), the Taraba State Governor, Danbaba Suntai, to drum home the importance of prayer, redefined Government House as “the Centre for the Seat of God in Taraba State and the people working there are just His representatives”. He therefore decreed that prayers be said at 8am, 12noon and 4pm daily on working days. He warned:

...any Christian or Muslim who finds this arrangement unsatisfactory is humbly requested to relocate from Government House... It has become compulsory that to work in Government House, Jalingo, you must adhere to this worship policy (Alubo 2008, p.7).

Recently, the former Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, and his group of prayer warriors have been making renewed call to Nigerians to bend down in prayer, and take their burden to God. They rightly noted that the country has human and natural resources which the current state of the nations does not justify. Many years have come and gone since this filial expression of faith in God as a sure way out of Nigeria’s loathsome situation, yet, not much has changed. Does it then mean that Nigerians have not been praying enough?. Or can it be said that the option for prayer has equally failed to bring Nigeria back to track?

One fact which is not appreciated by our leaders, past and present, is that God is not a magician who tricks people into a religious experience; but rather he is a

master craftsman who shapes the vessels whom he plans to use in the building of any nation. "Look at the goodness of God", says the Christian teacher. But when we look at the world of solid reality, as seen in the contemporary Nigeria, things seem far from God (Wenham, 1985). That is why Ekwunife (2007), warns that one should not pray with a misguided spirit, since it is easy to be trapped between true prayer with intensive sincerity (ie prayer with sincere spirits) and a prayer like that of prayer of corruption. He concludes that *Prayer for Corruption* is

... a formalized prayer in appearance calculated to deceive both God and fellow human beings with negative effects on human society. In short, it is a prayer that is characterized by hypocrisy, simulated pride, pomposity, smart boasting and adulterated verbosity (p.97).

In sum, God's blessings are not without conditions. For example one condition is that a results-oriented management demands faith in the future and ability to appraise the present as objectively and accurately as possible. This calls for competence and integrity. Faith and integrity are qualities which can be anchored most firmly on religion, a personal commitment to God, the fountain of wisdom and love. "I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plan for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29¹¹). Implicit in this is that God advocates for rational planning of resource use. The search for and the determination of the relevant plans, if you like, call it divine plans, constitute the first challenge to rational management of the economy. Specifically, Christian thought has always recognized the need for at least, short term planning while in every circumstance deprecating anxiety not concern for the future: "For which of you", Jesus asked, "desiring to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it"? (Lk. 14: 28-31).

What one can derive from the above is that hard work and rational planning by man turn God's blessings into man's favour. As Okoro (2003) rightly asserts, for man to positively escape from lives difficulties, he has to satisfy his total needs; and to achieve this, he has to be active and productive. The corollary to this has been stated by Apostle Paul as follows: If any one will not work, let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busy-bodies, not doing any work. Now such persons, we command... to earn their own living (2Thess. 3:10b-12).

Prayers like the ones shown above are tantamount to tempting God. Few cannot be scandalously wealthy at the expenses of the masses, and we expect God, through prayers and revivals, to solve our political and socio-economic development problems. The solution rather lies in the re-evaluation of values and good governance. We cannot be an acquisitive and consumer-oriented nation yet develop. We cannot conceive and interpret life in terms of acquisitive rather than productive efforts, and be developed like others (Okolo, 2003).

Suggestions for the way forward

1. The need to re-evaluate our values

Oguejiofor (2004) was correct when he said that Nigerians

...value religious faith, but somehow we do not think that this goes with serious moral obligations. We want good and accountable leaders, but we are unable to demand from them any account of their stewardship (p.19).

According to him, part of our problem is the contradictory values. We would like to move on yet we do not want to hold our leaders accountable, who are not interested in the common good. And the common good, according to the Vatican II,

as cited in (Ekwunife 2007), “embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enable individual, families and organizations to achieve complete and efficacious fulfillment” (p.125). In the traditional Nigerian society, the essence of existence was the common good of all. Thus, achieving wealth in traditional Nigerian society has both communalistic and individualistic aspects. Moreover, then public administration was decentralized and pre-colonial public systems included sound and effective system of accountability, even though, these were informal and trust-based (Shah, 1998).

It is our contention that one way out of this situation is to re-evaluate our values, which presently is geared towards personal acquisition of wealth. The suggestion is based on the fact that, in the traditional setting, even though wealth is a value, not all wealth is acceptable as ill-gotten wealth is avoided (Eneh and Okolo, 2003). May be we should adhere to the suggestion or admonition of Ekwunife (2007) that the only way to solve the present problems of Nigerian development is through a meticulous resurgence of African traditional culture with their resilient values, where mundane activities are subjected to the external vigilance and evaluation of the Supernatural ultimate. This suggestion is acceptable to us because as he rightly observed, the traditional religious structures serve to conscientize the society periodically on positive virtues of society and also repudiate unguarded, selfish and individualistic, economic pursuits modeled on the capitalistic system.

Nigerians need to be re-schooled in discipline and self-mastery and re-oriented toward higher values. This should be through proper education which will include, as part of its philosophy, the need for hard-work, sacrifice, responsibility, respect for the rights of others, honesty and self-control. This calls for serious mobilization through educational endeavours, because as defined by Deutsch (1980) mobilization is:

...the process in which major clusters of social, economic and psychological commitments are eroded and broken and people become available for new patterns of socialization and behaviour (p. 463).

The mobilization we have in mind involves commitment to undergo mental changes in old and dysfunctional social, economic and psychological ideas and practices and the fostering of new and progressive ones. The prophets of old did not call indiscriminately for God’s blessings on the people when they know that humans first had to change their ways. Therefore, if there is a prayer that the nation needs at this point, it is for God to give Nigerians the courage to rise up against the exploitative character of the leadership of this nation. In order words, the responsibility of our “prayer warriors” taking a cue from the 8th century Hebrew prophets is to fore-warn those who are thwarting our people’s destiny, to desist to avoid the coming wrath of God through the instrumentality of the people.

2. The introduction of Good Governance System

The World Bank (1992) defines governance as “the way to exercise power in the context of the management of economic and social resources for the development of a country”(p.8). According to the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), within that definition, three specific elements of governance can be discerned: the type of political regime, in a country, the process by which authority is exercised in the management of economic and social resources for the country’s development, and the capacity of government to define, formulate and execute policies and fulfill their basic functions (ECDPM, 1996).

For our purpose, it is the last two that we are concerned. Citizens expect that state officials use public funds to provide value-for-money public goods and services.

Improper use of public finance over the decades in Nigeria, has resulted in fiscal crisis and governance crisis which have weakened state apparatus and have under-mined her capacity to promote economic development. It is important that in our quest for transparency and accountability, both EFCC and ICPC in the discharge of their duties should recognize three concerns:

- ** the need for efficiency in resources allocation and use;
- ** the need to foster enduring institutions; and
- ** an accompanying culture that makes for accountability

One of the main preoccupations of good governance is controlling corruption and establishing transparent and accountability principles. The governance principles of accountability, accessibility and availability of information, a legal framework for development, insistence on transparency, freedom of information and the existence of civil society organizations should be integrated into our national integrity system that should be able to fight corruption (Stapenhurst and Langseth, 1997).

Similarly, conscious efforts should be made to improve the effectiveness of the Nigerian state political institutions and the variables needed include government commitment to contracts, bureaucratic quality, the rule of law, protection from expropriation, extent of corruption, quality, credibility of government commitment (Kaufman, and Zoido- Loboton 2002; Easterly and Levine, 2003; Dollar and Kray, 2003). There is therefore the need for the political development of Nigeria along the lines of the variables. One of the factors crucial in the process of political development, according to Moore (2000), is the source of income of the ruling elite. He makes a distinction between earned and unearned income. Earned income requires the ruling elite or state to construct an institutional structure which penetrates the countryside so as to be able to measure and extract resources. The second, the state or ruling elite must invest resources in protecting the tax paying capacity of its citizens.

Oil, which is an unearned income, does not require much effort upon the ruling elite. That is, little institutional structure is necessary to collect the revenue and little reciprocity is involved. The ruling elite has been autonomous from its citizens. They do not depend on them at all for the revenue necessary to survive and maintain their position. This is one basic reason why the Nigerian state is weak and corruption thriving. According to Midgal (1984) for a state to be strong, it must have the capacity and the capability to really penetrate its society, regulate its social relationships, and be able to extract the resources it needs from the society and to appropriate or use those resources in determined ways.

Mabogunje (1994) alluded to this when he noted that the weakness of the Nigerian state is shrouded from view because of easy access to the resources windfall from petroleum. According to him:

This has enabled the political class as well as the bureaucrats to continue to behave as if they are benefactors of society. It has encouraged them to engage in distributing patronage and largesse to all and sundry and therefore to become indifferent to the hassle and inconveniences they cause the citizens in the process (p. 4)

It is therefore suggested that we go back to agricultural production, which was crippled by the ruling elite through heavy taxation, without the provision of resources and services which would enhance productivity. These policies were maintained by the ruling elite via a destructive form of patron-client policies.

Conclusion

Nigeria's 1999 constitution contains several provisions geared towards good governance, supported by judicial validation of accountability and transparency, augmented by anti-corruption legislations, and the articulation and vigorous pursuit of the "anti-corruption" policies. Yet, corruption has permeated all facets of our nation.

Good harvest has been interpreted as due reward for appropriate worship, or good behaviour, or both; calamities have been reviewed as the result of "sin". Perhaps it is for this reason that Nigerians resorted to prayers as a panacea to their national problems. However, it needs to be emphasized that the efficacy of prayer depends largely on some basic criteria, and this it appears, is where the Nigeria's case of extreme poverty and other socio-economic problems may be well understood. In the first place, prayer is a special act of the virtue of religion and it is a special communion with God. This means that prayer presupposes a personal communion with the divine (God); a relationship that challenges man to embrace virtues and jettison vices. By implication, he who is to pray, should firstly, align his /her life to the demands of God. Thus, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, prayer and Christian life are inseparable. Nigerians should therefore bear in mind that "transformation of the praying heart is the first response to our petition" it is therefore obvious that the efficacy of prayer is highly dependent on good conduct. St. John Chrysostom rightly stated that it is contradictory for the man "who prays eagerly and invoke God ceaselessly... to sin". Consequently, until Nigerians, who call to God, for instance, jettison the vices and evils that are very prevalent in their state of affairs (bribery, corruption, injustice etc), the country's fortunes may never change for the better.

The firm belief, for both the Christian, Muslim and Traditional believers, is that petitions must be subject to divine will; otherwise it cannot meet the approval of God. The implication here is that certain things we ask of God through prayer may not receive his approval especially when God in His omnipotence, knows that such gifts could lead us astray. Perhaps, this may explain the puzzle of Nigeria's experience of un-answered prayers, bearing in mind that our leaders who delude Nigerians into organizing such prayer sections, are not spiritually and morally qualified to do so. Unfortunately, there has been nothing positive about such exhortations to lift the hearts of Nigerians who are facing the most outrageous contradictions of human existence—stupendously endowed, but lack the most basic things of life. Our leaders ought to know that religiosity and spirituality are not the same. Spirituality focuses on love, kindness, integrity, selflessness, caring for one another as an end; but religiosity emphasizes church—going and effusive prayer.

One way of attaining socio-economic development is to fight against corruption; and to achieve that is to fight against people's attitude. Unless Nigerians are transformed by bringing them back to the part of integrity, any fight against corruption is definitely fruitless. Thus, the clamour for and the adoption of prayer as the solution to the Nigeria's political and socio-economic problems is a contradictory package. It is a typical case of reality confronting rhetorics.

References

- Achunike, H.C (2007). Prosperity Preaching in Nigerian Religious Space. In *Nigeria Journal of Social Science* 4(1) 83-96
- Adimboye, D. (2008). A Can of Worms. *Newswatch* Vol. 47 No. 13 March 31st 16-23.
- Adimboye, D. and Agbaegbu D. (2008). The N2.5Billion Bribe Scam. *Newswatch* Vol. 48. No. 11, 12-19.
- Agada, E.I. (2008). The Phenomenon Called Miracle. In *The Saviourites*, 2008/2009 edition 6-12.
- Agbaegbu, T. and Mikil M. (2008). Fruitless Search for the Missing Trillions. *Newswatch* Vol. 48. No. 8 12-21.
- Ajero, C. (2008). A Chamber of Scandal. *Newswatch* Vol. 48 N0. 3, 14-21.
- Anya, O. A. (2008). *Education, Scholarship and the Wealth and Health of the Nation: The Search of the Dialectics of Sustainable Development*, being a valedictory lecture held at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka on 14th August.
- Asiodu, P.C. (2000). Keynote Address at the Stakeholders National Programme on Governance for sustainable Human Development, Abuja, 24th May
- Ayomide O. (2008). The Queen of Scandals. *Tell* Vol. 30 No. 14, April 20-26.
- Ayorinde, F.O. and E.O. Uga (1999). Resources Mobilization and Management in an African Country: The Case of Nigeria. In Fajugbasi *et al* (eds) *Resource Mobilization and Management for Development*, Ibadan: NCEMA
- Bello, H.M. (1988). Corruption: Why it Thrives. *Nigerian National Conference Corruption and Other Economic Crimes in Nigerian*. Lagos. Federal Ministry of Justice, 13-15 December.
- Catan T. and J. Chaffin (2003) Bribery Has Long Been Used To Land International Contract. *Financial Times* (May 8).
- Catechism of the Catholic Church (1999) New Dehli: Rekka printers.
- Deutsch, K (1980). Social Mobilization and Political Development. In *American Political Service Review* vol.LV 46.
- Dudley, B.J. (1982). *An introduction to Nigerian government and politics*. Ibadan Macmillan.

- Dollar, D. and A. Kray (2003). Institutions, Trade and Growth. In *Journal of Monetary Economics* vol. 50.
- Easterly, W and R. Levine (2003). Tropics, and Germs and Crops: how endowments influences economic development. In *Journal of monetary economics*, vol 50
- ECDPM (1996). Le processus de formulation des politiques: Voie institutionnelle ou labyrinthe institutionnelle?. ECDPM report, No3, October.
- Ekunwufe, A.N.O. (2007). *What Will Be, Will Be: Why Pray, Lagos: Priceless Prints.*
- Eneh, J.O and C.B Okolo (2003). The common good and political stability. In Dukor, M. (ed). *Philosophy and Political Discourse on Values, Politics and Power in Africa*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Gbadagesu S. (2008). Prayer, Protest and the state of the Nation. The Nation Newspaper July 4.
- Ibeanu, O. (2008). *Affluence and Afflictions. The Niger Delta as an critique of Political Science*, An inaugural lecture of the University of Nigerian Nsukka held in February, Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press Ltd .
- Joseph, R. (1990). *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaufman, D.A. and P. Zoido-Lobaton (2002). Governance Matter 11:Updated Governance Indicators for 2000-2001. Working Paper 2552, World Bank Policy Research Department, February.
- Kukah, M. H. (2003). *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigerian*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Lovin, R. (1992). Religion and Politics. In Kawkesworth, M and Kogan M. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Government on Politics*. Vol. 1 London: Routledge.
- Mabongunje, I Akin (1999). Institutional Radicalization, Local Governance and Democratization in Nigerian. In Olowu, D, K. Soremekun and A. Williams (eds.) *Governance Democratization in Nigerian*. Spectrum Books Ltd 1-13.
- Midjal, J.S. (1984). *Strong Societies and Weak States. State- Societies Relations and State Capabilities in the Third world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Moore, M. (2000). Political Underdevelopment. Mimeo, institute of Development Studies, September.
- Nduka, O. (2006). *The Roots of African Under-development and other Essays*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.

- Nwamadi, L. (2001). Catholic Social Teaching (Unpublished Mimeo).
- Obadan, M. I. and Odusola A.F. (1999). *Savings Investment and Growth Connections in Nigeria: Empirical evidence and policy Implications*. NCEMA policy Analysis, Series 5 (2).
- Oguejiofor, J.O. (2004). The Need for Re-evaluation of Nigerian Values. *Bigard Theological Studies*, 24 (2), July-December,
- Okolo, C.B. (2003). The African Condition. In Dukor, M. (ed). *Philosophy and Political Discourse on Values, Politics and Power in Africa*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Olurode, Lai (2005). Democracy, The Money Culture and Citizenship Rights in Nigerian: 1999-2005. In *Democracy, Good Governance and Corruption in Nigerian*. Olurodi Lai and S.O . Akinboye (eds) Friedrich Ebert Stifting.
- Shah, A. (1998). *Balance, Accountability and Responsiveness, lessons about democratization* Research Working Paper No. 2021, the World Bank, Washington D.C.
- Stapenhurst, F. and Langseth P. (1997). The Role of the Public Administration in Fighting Corruption. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*. 10 (5).
- Tangri, R. (1999). *The Politics of Patronage in Africa*, London. James Curry.
- The Vatican Council (1988). *Nostra aetate*, Iperu-Remo: Ogun State-Dominican Publishers.
- Utomi, P. (2000). *Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Political Economy and Management*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Wenham, J.W. (1985). *The Enigma of Evil: Can We Believe in the Goodness of God*. Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation.
- World Bank (1992). *Governance and Development* Washington: Washington, D.C.