



RELIGIOSITY AS THE ROOT OF IMMORALITY AMONG CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA:
THE NEED FOR SPIRITUALITY

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Abstract

Due to the perceived correlation between religiosity and immorality among Christians in Nigeria, the paper argues that religiosity is the root of immorality among Christians, while spirituality is suggested as the way forward. This is done through conceptual analyses of religiosity and spirituality and their biblical reflections.

Keywords: Religiosity, Immorality, Spirituality, most Religious Nation, most Corrupt Nation

Introduction

From the time past until now, Nigeria has always been considered as one of the most religious nations on earth based on the level of her citizens' commitment and participation in religious activities, and the overwhelming number of religious centres across the length and breadth of the country. As one of the religious groups in Nigeria, the Christians constitute a reasonable percentage of the nation's population, and through their "notorious" religious activities, they contribute significantly to the status of Nigeria being regarded as one of the most religious nations on earth. There are many Christian churches and convention grounds in every town and village where the Christians gather regularly for worship and crusade for conversion of souls, deliverance from spiritual oppression and break through in life. Apart from all these, the Christians are also found on major streets, public places and market squares preaching the gospel for the conversion of souls and repentance from sinful ways of life. In fact, the crux of the christian religious activities is for the Christians to be the 'light and salt' of the world, that is, for them to be an epitome of morality.

As stated above, there is high level of religiosity in Nigeria but it is quite unfortunate to state that the high level of religiosity experienced among Nigerians (and in particular, the Christians) has not been properly translated into the high level of moral

standard expected of a religious booming society like Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2015). It should also be stated

that in spite of the overwhelming presence of churches across the country, Nigeria is nothing but a nation on her knees in morals and good conducts. Even Christian leaders are at loss over the challenge of moral decadence their faith has seemed unable to combat (Oladipo, 2012). This is to say that the Nigerian Christians still indulge in all kinds of immorality (such as extortion, fraud, bribery and corruption, human trafficking and other social vices) in their respective homes, places of work, public gatherings and churches. This may be a reason advanced for Nigeria occupying the 28th position of the most corrupt 46 nations according to the latest ranking of the 2017 edition of Transparency International after the country had consecutively been in the top ten for over a decade (Odunsi, 2017).

Immorality among the Nigerian Christians is widespread and it has eaten deep into the fabric of the Christian community such that they live like the people in the world (unbelievers whose lives are characterized by immorality of all kinds) even though they are not of the world. Christians are expected to lead by good conducts, be an epitome of morality and not vice versa. It is imperative to state that religiosity is associated with the life of the flesh - a life characterized by sin. This explains why immorality reigns among the Nigerian Christians despite being religious. In order for the Nigerian Christians to lead



by good conducts and be an epitome of morality therefore, there is need for them to be spiritual rather than being religious. This is because spirituality is characterized by the life of the spirit and holiness required for moral uprightness.

Religiosity and its Biblical Reflection

Religiosity has been defined by various scholars to describe the involvement and participation of the religious adherents in religious activities. Zinnbauer, Pargament and Scott in Reed and Neville (2014) define religiosity as attending worship services, church membership, subscription to institutional dogma, personal faith or belief in a higher power, prayer, and integration of religious beliefs into daily life that constitute both organizational and non-organizational involvement with religion. In another perspective, Webster's New World College Dictionary (2010) defines religiosity as the quality of being religious, especially of being excessively ostentatiously, or mawkishly religious. This is to further explain that excessive involvement in religious activities is often driven more by individual beliefs than the contents of the actual religion (Compelling Truth, 2008). It can therefore be inferred that religiosity is characterized by external, visible and excessive involvement in religious activities.

In Christianity, religiosity occurs when people focus on church activity, rules (which often go beyond actual biblical commands), tradition, and pet doctrines rather than on relationship with God. Religiosity is characterized by a lack of grace, love, and true enjoyment of life, which makes an individual to depend on his ability to do or achieve things rather than depending on God (compelling Truth, 2008). There is also lack of adherence to the tenets of one's religion, and the commitment to live within such. Hence, Lenski (1963) affirmed that a person could be highly visible within a church community but not truly accepting its doctrines. At the same time, Lenski, declared that a religious person may not allow some dimensions of religiosity to invade his/her daily life; a person may know or believe, but not live accordingly. By implication, it means that one's profession of faith and life-styles are at variance. This is often the case when a Christian depends on his ability in doing things rather than God or the Holy Spirit.

The Old and New Testaments contain some reflection of religiosity. In the Old Testament, at one time or the other, the Israelites' religiosity betrayed their profession of faith in God. The Israelites as a people of God were expected to live by God's guidance and direction and keep His commands as stipulated in the Law. The Law expresses the mind of God and his intentions for his people. Thus, the Israelites were to meditate on, study, and keep the Law (Deut. 6:4-9) (Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, n.d). But contrary to this, the Israelites were found indulging in all kinds of immorality such as injustice, oppression and extortion of the poor and other social vices (Amos 5:7, 10&11) which were not expected to be found among them. In the midst of these kinds of immorality by the rich against the poor and the weak, the rich still perform their religious obligations such as burnt offerings and communion sacrifices, but God had to reject them because of their failure to keep His Law (Amos 5: 22-24).

Israelites' religiosity as reflected in their immorality and religious observance is also reported by both prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah respectively. Jeremiah has this to say:

"Yes, the people of Judah have done what displeases me,

Yahweh declares. They have set up their bears my name, to defile it and have built the high places of Topheth in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, to burn their sons and daughter; a thing I never ordered, that had never entered my thoughts" (Jer 7:30&31).

In his own case, Isaiah reported thus:

"What are your endless sacrifices to me? says Yahweh.

I am sick of burnt offerings... Bring no more futile cereal offerings, the smoke from them fills me with disgust.

New Moons, Sabbaths, assemblies -I cannot endure solemnity combined with guilt" (Isaiah 1:11-13)."

God had to reject the worships of the Israelites because of their immorality and their failure to live appropriately before Him. Living appropriately before God transcends religious observance combined with guilt; it is all about pursuit of a holy life achieved in God.



In the New Testament, the religious sects (Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes) during the times of Jesus Christ belonged to the groups of people within Judaism whose religiosity was openly condemned by Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, Jesus Christ referred to them as hypocrites not because they practiced Judaism but because of their excessive involvement in activities, rules, tradition and doctrines associated with Judaism in such a way that goes beyond the actual biblical commands or what to believe (Matt 15:1-9). Another reflection of religiosity in the New Testament is also seen in the Acts of the Apostles where the story about their religiosity of Saul, a Pharisee was presented (8:1; 9: 1&2). Here we see Saul persecuting the Church of God out of his excessive involvement in Judaism and zeal for God in a way contrary to the biblical commands. At this junction, it should be observed that where religiosity prevails, immorality thrives because there is always disconnection between belief and behaviour, as in the case of Paul the Pharisee and other religious sects in the New Testament.

Spirituality and its Biblical Reflection

The word 'spirituality' is believed to have originated from a Christian community in North Africa in the second century A.D (Haykin, 1999 & Sheldrake, 2016). The word translates a Latin noun "spiritualitas", associated with the adjective "spiritualis" (spiritual). These two Latin words are derived from the Greek noun "pneuma"(spirit) and the adjective "pneumatikos" as they appear in St. Paul's New Testament letters (Sheldrake, 2016) to describe all the activities in a believer's life that are prompted and inspired by the Holy Spirit (Haykin, 1999). According to Newman (2004), for people to be spiritual or have spirituality, they attempt to live a life guided by the spirit of their faith. Such people may meditate, pray, or make conscious decisions regarding their actions, based on how they sense the spirit leading them. This is to argue that spirituality entails living under the influence of the spirit of God or the Holy Spirit as the case may be.

The goal of spirituality is to be renewed in holiness, righteousness, and knowledge after the likeness of God (Eph 4: 24; Col 3:10), or to become more like Jesus Christ by whose stature the Christian maturity is measured (Eph 4: 13-16). The goal is to acquire a Christian construal of everything (Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, 1996). Because

spirituality is a life animated by the Spirit of God, therefore, it is practiced with love, holiness, and justice. It works for freedom, stands with the poor, and delights in right relationship with the natural world (Wolfteich, 2012). All these constitute what it means to live after the manner of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christians extend Jesus' mission by being a 'living message' through the kind of people they are and how they act in the world (Sheldrake, 2016).

Although the word spirituality as a concept is not expressively used in the Bible, there are instances that suggest its usage in relation to some individuals and a community of believers. In the Old Testament, the reports or stories about individuals such as Joseph, Daniel, and Job whose conducts and ways of life show their fear of God and possession of the Spirit of God present them as individuals with some level of spirituality. We see this in the life of Joseph in Genesis 39:6-10; 40:6-8; 41: 38 & 39 and 42: 18. We also have the stories about the spirituality of Job and Daniel in Job: 1&8; Daniel 2:17-19 and 6:4-5. In all these instances, the phrases, "the fear-of-the Lord, and the spirit of God" are deployed in place of spirituality to speak about individuals who distinguished themselves by the spirit of God to live a moral life.

In Acts of the Apostles 4:31-37;5:32 and 6:10, there is another reflection of spirituality of Christian believers (the early church). During the early church, believers submitted themselves to be used and guided by the Holy Spirit in all ways. Because their actions were informed by the Holy Spirit, they were able to live loving one another as they shared everything they had in common, and keeping God's commands. In terms of moral life, they were well-informed. Every act of immorality was dealt with according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in such a way that the fear of God was instilled in believers (Acts 5: 1-11; 6: 1-6).

Immorality among Nigerian Christians

Immorality (as things that are wrong like stealing, lying, sexual vice, antagonism and rivalry, drunkenness, child trafficking, etc) is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the moral life of many Nigerian Christians. It is no surprise that many Nigerian Christians, on daily basis freely engage in immoral acts, at home, places of work, in the church and in public places without any fear and remorse



such that it becomes very difficult to identify an individual as a Christian by profession of faith. This is to say that there is no connection between belief and behaviour of many Christians in Nigeria.

According to Oladipo (2012), the greatest threat to Christianity (in Nigeria) in the 21st century is not in ritualism, dogman or orthodoxy, but rather it is the disconnection between belief and behaviour. As a result of this, many Christians have failed to lead a moral life for them to become a role model for the people around them to emulate. Christians are regarded as 'salt and light of the world' (Matt 5: 13 &14) who should add taste to the world and by their light, show others the path of morality to tread. But it is rather unfortunate that many Christians have failed in this regard because of disconnection between belief and behaviour which has resulted to all kinds of immorality among them.

Moreover, Christians are reminded that they are in the world, but not of the world (John 15: 19). This implies that Christians are not expected to indulge themselves in all kinds of immorality that are found among the people of the world (unbelievers) but rather distinguish themselves by doing what is good and acceptable and mature (Romans 12:2). But because of disconnection between belief and behaviour in the way many Christians live their lives and practise Christianity, there is no distinction between the unbelievers and the Christians in terms of their immoral life styles. They both and equally indulge in all kinds of immorality that are found in the world today. This assertion finds credence in the claim that Christians today in whatever employment they find themselves participate with unbeliever in full glare in fraud(whether of the government or whoever), extortion, taking and giving of gratification (Oladipo, 2012).

It is pertinent therefore, to say that immorality among Christians in Nigeria is widespread. As a consequence, it has some negative effects on the church. It should be mentioned that because of the prevalence of immorality among Christians many people now view the church as an irrelevant and hypocritical institution (Oladipo, 2012). This is the case because of disconnection between belief and behaviour of many Christians in Nigeria. Besides, many people (unbelievers) look at the Church and not think of it as being any different from any other

institution (Kim, 2018). This is indisputably true because both the Christians and unbelievers freely indulge in immorality, and so it is difficult to tell who a Christian is.

Religiosity as Root of Immorality among Christians in Nigeria

In his attempt to describe the nature and level of the religiosity of the Africans, Mbiti in Gumo, Gisege, Raballah and Otuma (2012) affirmed that:

"Africans are notoriously religious. Wherever the African is, there is religion. He carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party, or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliament".

In the light of this affirmation, it is believed that religion is part and parcel of the Africans' lifestyle. The point that should be made here is that the religious beliefs of the Africans cut across the three major religions and diverse cultural practices in Africa. This is the reason a Christian will combine the practice of Christianity with some beliefs and practices in African traditional religion and culture. This is evident in a research survey conducted by Pew Research Center (2010) which reveals that despite the levels of commitment to Christianity and Islam, many people in the countries surveyed retain beliefs and rituals that are characteristic of traditional African religions.

Based on this, it is not out of point to argue that many Christians in Nigeria are notoriously religious, hence they indulge themselves in either systemic, cultural or religious immoral practices (retaliation, war, massacre, etc) which are found among the people around them or adherents of other religions. But as noted by Life-Compelling Truth (2008), this involvement is often driven more by individual beliefs than the content of the actual religion (Christianity). Thus, some Christians in Nigeria take as ultimate, in a matter of decision, what they believe out of intuition rather than to act according to the tenets of Christianity. This is to infer that there is disconnection between belief and behaviour in Christian religiosity which makes them to indulge in all kinds of



immorality despite their excessive involvement in Christian activities. Pope Francis (2013) in Ojonemi, Audu, Omisore and Wada (2014) explained this assertion in his own view that inconsistency on the part of pastors and the faithful between what they say and what they do, between word and manner of life, is undermining the church's credibility.

Meanwhile, when a Christian knows and believes (the tenets of Christianity) but not live accordingly, it follows that such a Christian is self-indulgent: the desire of the 'flesh' is more important to him more than depending on God or Holy Spirit for his actions or behaviour. Recognising the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian, St Paul in his letter to the Galatians advises Christians to be guided by the Spirit, and they will no longer yield to self-indulgence (5:17). The religiosity of some Christians in Nigeria is characterized by self-indulgence, hence they continue to indulge themselves in all kinds of immorality which should not be found among them. Again, St Paul gives credence to this assertion when he writes that when self-indulgence is at work the results are obvious; sexual vice, impurity, and sensuality, the worship of false gods and sorcery, bad temper and quarrels, disagreements, factions and malice, drunkenness, orgies and all such things (Gal.5:19-21a). Because self-indulgence is inherent in religiosity, therefore, immorality reigns among Christians in Nigeria with resultant effects on the church and Nigeria as a whole.

The Need for Spirituality among Christians in Nigeria Spirituality is characterized by fear-of-the-Lord and ultimately by the Holy Spirit. When Christians are guided by the Holy Spirit according to the letter of St Paul to the Galatians, they will no longer yield to self-indulgence (5:16). St. Paul went further to state that the fruit of the Spirit Christians are expected to bear when they are guided by the spirit to include: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control (5:22 & 23a). When Christians produce these fruits, it implies that they are truly the 'salt' and 'light' of the world in which they live. Therefore, they are expected to be agents of morality worthy of emulation and capable of instilling sanity into the system they find themselves in such a way that the image of the Church and that of their country is portrayed in good light. As a matter of fact, they are expected to be good

ambassadors of the Church (Christ) and their country.

The major cause of self-indulgence that leads to immorality among Christians in Nigeria is disconnection between belief and behaviour. It is no surprise that a good number of Christians in Nigeria are not living by the tenets and injunctions of Christianity which are meant to help them live morally and stand out among others in terms of good moral behaviour. They go to church and participate in Christian activities regularly, pay their tithes and make other donations to the church, read the bible and pray regularly, encourage one another in the Christian faith, and preach to make new converts, but yet they indulge themselves in all kinds of immoral acts (extortion, fraud, bribery and corruption, lying, steal, etc) at home, places of work and in public places. This shows that the irreligiosity does not have any influence or moral effect on their behaviour. In the light of this, there is need for spirituality among the Christians in Nigeria in order for them to match their religiosity with correlative behaviour to live morally.

Besides, the immoral behaviour of some Christians in Nigeria is undermining the church's credibility. As a matter of fact, many people now consider the Church as hypocritical because of the disconnection that exists between belief and behaviour of some Christians. Ideally, the Church as a moral agent is supposed to lead people on the path of morality and sound behaviour by what it preaches and stands for, while its members are expected to be role models worthy of emulation in terms of sound moral behaviour, and good ambassadors (of the church) to portray the Church in good light within the Church community and the larger society. But unfortunately, the Church is not living up to this expectation as a good number of Christians indulge in all kinds of immorality which should not be found among them. Therefore, in order to restore the Church's credibility in the eyes of the people within and outside the Church, there is need for spirituality among the Christians in Nigeria as this will help them to have the fear of God to live the moral life expected of them.

Nigeria has always been considered as one of the most religious nations on earth because of proliferation of religious centres, religious participation of her citizens, profession of faith and



belief in God, large number of religious adherents, etc. But despite the level of her religiosity, the country has always been rated as one of the most corrupt nations of the world. Corruption as a generic name encompasses all kinds of immorality such as stealing of public fund, money laundry, election malpractices, nepotism, etc in which many Nigerians indulge. This is not expected of a country in which a considerable number of her population belongs to the Christian faith. By implication, it means that Christians who are supposed to be agents of morality, role models for others to emulate and good ambassadors of the country are also corrupt. Meanwhile, in order for the country not to be rated as one of the corrupt nations on earth and to redeem the image of the country, there is need for spirituality among Christians as this will help them to abstain from corrupt practices and live a moral life worthy of emulation (that will have positive effects on others) since they form a large size of the population of the people in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Immorality is a cankerworm that must be dealt with among Christians in Nigeria if the Church's credibility must be restored and the country's image redeemed. Since it has been argued that religiosity is the root of immorality among Christian in Nigeria, there is need for spirituality to reign among them in order to destroy the cankerworm of immorality.

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