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## APPROPRIATING CHRISTIAN ETHICAL VALUES IN ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Nigeria society today is bedeviled with problems of bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public fund, insecurity, nepotism, favouritism, kidnapping and so on which has over the years made developmental efforts of government a mirage. On this issue, many researches have been carried out in order to find a lasting solution to these seemingly insurmountable problems. Many programmes, strategies implemented by government, its agencies and commissions to bring the problems under control such as Ethical Revolution (ER), National Rebirth (NR), Rebranding Nigeria Campaign (RNC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) and so on have not been able to nail the problems in the bud. However, an area which seems to have been largely ignored and which is responsible for the inability is the absence of Christian ethical values in the entire discourse. That is, the neglect of Christian ethical values of transparency, social justice, honesty and love among those in the corridors of power in the country on one hand and the followers on the other hand. This paper therefore, examined the Christian ethical values that are closely related to sustainable development, its meaning and how the values can be used to engender sustainable development in Nigeria.*

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*We also offered recommendations for stakeholders; the political leaders and the followers alike on the need to make Christian ethical values of transparency, social justice, honesty and love their watchwords in both their private and public dealings.*

## **Introduction**

Nigerian national dailies are replete with various stories of corruption and embezzlement of public funds on a large scale by those that are placed in the positions of trust in the country. The money realized from the sale of crude oil over the years which is supposed to be spent on improving the standard of living of the citizenry is being looted by political office holders<sup>i</sup>. It is due to this unbridled level of corruption in Nigeria that made the former Chairman of Revenue Mobilization and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) Hamman Tukur to say that the economy of the country was being looted with impunity<sup>ii</sup>.

Corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of our nation and its effect is felt on every sector of the country. This is why Omoregbe said the country is morally sick and needs an urgent moral operation<sup>iii</sup>. Nigeria cannot survive, if we continue in this state of anomie of lack of morals<sup>iv</sup>. The pertinent question that needs to be answered at this juncture is to find out where we got it wrong as a nation? The answer to this question is not far-fetched. Nigerians are religious and since many of those who occupy political posts in the country are Christians, it is expected of them therefore to manifest Christian ethical values not only in words but also in action in order to influence other political office holders that belong to other religious affiliations positively. The neglect of Christian ethical values by both the government and the governed has led the country into the mirage of problems facing it in the recent time. For the country to be free from these mammoth of problems, there is the need for those at the helm of affairs in Nigeria to exemplify values of

transparency, honesty, social justice and love which are some of Christian ethical values. The missing point is the neglect of these Christian ethical values that are related to sustainable development. Politicians and political office holders have thrown these values into the wind thereby making morality to be a scarce commodity in the nation.

### **What is Sustainable Development?**

Sustainable development has been defined as any development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generation to meet their own needs. It is all about finding better way of doing things both for the present and the future<sup>v</sup>. We might need to change the way we do things and how we live now, our decisions and its impacts as a society will have either a beneficial or detrimental consequences on people's lives.

Sustainable development provides an approach to making better decisions on issues that affect all and sundry; especially in the area of provision of good road, health care delivery system, qualitative education, food, job opportunities, shelter and so on. There is no doubt that Nigeria is experiencing unstable situation in every sector as a result of greed, self-centeredness on the part of few individuals who have turned the wealth of the nation to their birthrights. Such unstable situations are waging serious war against peace and a sustainable future<sup>vi</sup>. The word sustainable here means lasting, permanent or long lasting. While development means event causing change or an incident that causes a situation to change or progress that can be maintained year after year. The truth of the matter is that human beings are at the centre of concern for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.<sup>vii</sup> It also includes the conditions of reality that allows people to take their destiny into their hands individually and collectively.

When will Nigerians experience a long lasting progress? The Import of this discussion is to examine what we do today as political office holders that affect our tomorrow. Actions of politicians, political office holders and followers today as regards embezzlement of fund and corruption will definitely have a devastating effect on the country years to come. The welfare of the human person, seen in its totality, must interest policy-makers and their executives because the good health of a person becomes his wealth, and his skills cultivated through a carefully planned programmes help him to socialize and this is a crucial factor of production.<sup>viii</sup> Corrupt followers today are most likely to be corrupt leader leaders tomorrow.

Money meant for the provision of basic amenities for the people is being diverted to private account leaving the electorates to continue to wallow in penury. If those in government exemplify Christian ethical values as contained in the Bible, the high rate of corruption that has become a household name will not in the first instance have its way among our political office holders. The attitude of politicians in Nigeria and many other African countries is apposite to this Yoruba song "*Bámúbámú ni mo yó èmi ò mò, b'óyá ebi ní pa omo, eñi Kankan, bámúbámú ni mo yó.*" Meaning, am well fed, I don't want to know if anybody around me is hungry. Sustainable development will continue to elude the country until those elected, appointed or selected as the case may be put the interest of the people that elected them at heart. This can only be achieved when Christian ethical values of social justice, transparency, honesty and love are practiced in actual sense.

### **What are Christian Ethical Values?**

In light of the above discussion, it is crystal clear that sustainable development can only be achieved when all stakeholders in the country manifest the Christian

ethical values that are contained in the Bible to guide their steps thereby bringing sanity into the body polity. At this juncture therefore, it will be appropriate to discuss few of such ethical values as they relate to sustainable development.

### **Value of social justice**

Justice as an ethical value presupposes giving an individual what he or she deserves. It also implies that we must endeavour to defend innocence and promote justice and truth among mankind. It connotes equality of all persons irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, religion or other status<sup>ix</sup>. As earlier mentioned, one of the problems that can make sustainable development an uphill task to achieve is social injustice. This has become the bane of Nigerians. Social justice involves guaranteeing the right of every individual in the society; it is a moral virtue characteristically essential to any given society<sup>x</sup>. Wherever injustice exists, there will be disharmony, disunity, poverty of unimaginable proportion, agitation and counter agitation as we have been experiencing in the country in the past few years now. We have the Boko Haram in the North – Eastern part, the Movement for the Emancipation of the people of Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA). All these groups have constituted themselves as clogs in the wheel of progress in the nation. No development can take place where killing and wanton destruction of lives and properties have taken the centre stage. However, the importance of social justice is greatly emphasized in some Biblical passages. For instance, Amos 5:7 says “Ye who turn judgment to wormwood and leave off righteousness in the earth”. This is also buttressed in Amos 5:24 where he admonished the people that “Let judgment run down like waters and righteousness as a mighty stream<sup>xi</sup>.”

What we have observed so far in Nigeria is that the failure of those in positions of trust have really endangered development thereby bringing untold hardship to millions of Nigerians. Amos in the above passages admonished the leaders in Israel of fair treatment of all regardless of ethnic and tribal differences. This is a lesson for Nigerian leaders. Everything in the country has been politicized. To get a job in the country is no longer based on merit but on the connection you have. Merit has been sacrificed at the altars of nepotism and favouritism. As a result of social injustice, many tribes have been complaining of being marginalized and neglected and the only way they thought is the best for them to fight for their rights is to destroy government installations like gas and oil pipelines bringing hardship to already impoverished Nigerians<sup>xii</sup>. The government of the day as a matter of importance should exemplify the value of social justice through equitable distribution of the nation wealth without discrimination. It is only when this is done that there can be sustainable development. That is, when there is justice across the length and breadth of the country, when no section or group feel cheated, neglected, decimated and abandoned.

### **Imbibing Christian Ethical Value of Love**

For a guaranteed sustainable development that will be holistic in nature, the political office holders and the followers must imbibe the Christian value of love as it is a prerequisite for peace. The Bible describes love as the fulfillment of the law. In fact, taking a look at the Bible, there are many strong quotations on the need to relate with one another in love<sup>xiii</sup>. For example, John says "This is the message you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murder his brother". Jesus Christ in the same vein gives good example of how men should dwell together in love. For instance, the author of John

writes in 1 John 3:11-12. "We should love one another as Christ loves us, so we must love one another." Peter also in his gospel demonstrates how men from various groups could come together by showing love. He says in his letter that: "----see that ye love one another with a pure heart." The word love is emphasized in Mark 12:31 where the Bible says "You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no greater law than these."

The passages above give lucid information about the importance of love in our inter-personal relationship. How can we claim to be Christians when we do not love our neighbour? And if anybody claims to love God and hate his brethren, then the love of God is not in him. This then lays credence to the fact that those in government who are feeding fat on bribery and corruption and some followers too across the country shows that the love for their fellow men is not in them. This is because, if they love one another and the nation in general, money meant for the well being of the citizenry, will not be diverted into the private purse of few individuals, leaving millions of Nigerians to suffer. It is an established fact that those who embezzle money are adherents of one religious body or the other, this now leaves one to wonder that as adherents of one religious body or the other and since these religions preach love<sup>xiv</sup>. They should make a practical example of love not only in words but in action and indeed. Where there is love, justice will prevail and other vices will be avoided.

### **Value of Honesty**

For a desired sustainable development to be achieved, political office holders in the country must put on the garment of honesty in their dealings. Honesty means act of sincerity; that is, being sincere to oneself and others in the course of one form of interaction or the other at every given time<sup>xv</sup>. Honesty therefore goes with truthfulness, uprightness, sincerity and

straightforwardness in deed. What our politicians and followers lack is honesty. Honesty as the best policy is not evident in the contemporary society today, what is evident now is that to be honest does not pay. Honesty as a value is stressed in the Bible where in Proverbs 10:2, the Bible says "ill-gotten treasures have no lasting value, but righteousness delivers from death." Ayantayo posits that morality demands that political office holders be honest and faithful in order to discharge their official duties as expected of them. Honesty is a moral value which must be practiced by everybody<sup>xvi</sup>.

The get –rich –quick syndrome has beclouded our political leaders' sense of reason from treading the path of honour by being loyal and honest to their people. It will be difficult for a nation to sustain any development without hearts of patriotism and honesty from those at the helm of affairs in the nation. Bible specifically emphasizes in Proverb 14: 34 that "Righteousness exalts a nation but sin (*of dishonesty*) a reproach to any people." This is apposite to the words of St Augustine where he says "The man who loves himself does not love himself; it is the man who loves God that loves himself<sup>xvii</sup>." What this means is that "any man who throws honesty to the winds in order to amass wealth is short –sighted and foolish because he does not realize that we live in a universe ruled by the law of cause and effect and that after the cause the effect will surely follow-sooner or later in one form or the other and he will have cause to regret his short sightedness<sup>xviii</sup>."

In fact, the reality of this statement above is dawn on many corrupt political office holders today who have in one way or the other siphoned the wealth of the nation for their own private use. From the former security adviser to former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Colonel Sambo Dasuki with over 2 Billion Dollars money meant for the purchase of arms and ammunition for Nigerians army which was misappropriated<sup>xix</sup>, Femi Fani-kayode

the Peoples Democratic Party spokesman, Nnenadi Esther, Usman and Danjuma Yusuff N46 Billion fraud during Goodluck Jonathan administration that could not be accounted for<sup>xx</sup>, Mr. Olisah Metuh with N400 Million embezzled<sup>xxi</sup>, Retired Air Chief Amosu buried 1 Million Euros in a soak away pit and so on<sup>xxii</sup>. All these and many others in the net of Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) have tarnished their images and that of their families as a result of dishonesty. Pathetically, many Nigerians not only those in government are dishonest, many a follower is not in any way better as dishonesty is found in every sector of the country<sup>xxiii</sup>.

#### **Value of Transparency**

Transparency means that decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It is often regarded as a crucial factor for sustainable development<sup>xxiv</sup>. Transparency which is referred to (*À kóya wó*) among Yoruba is needed by the political and public office holders. They must be above board in their dealings since they are for the interest of the citizens at large and not for their own selfish interest<sup>xxv</sup>. A political office holder who is not transparent and who is not in the state of being accountable restrict the citizens from having a say about issues that concern the government and a chance to change the development of fluctuating decision making and hold those making decision to account<sup>xxvi</sup>. What has been observed in the case of Nigeria over the years is that those who are not transparent know that successive government does not have the political will to fight corruption and that anything done by them will be swept under the carpet. This is why the effort of the present administration under President

Mohammadu Buhari is highly commendable as he has shown through his body language and actions that corrupt individuals will not go scot free any longer. The fear of President Buhari has now become the beginning of wisdom.

In fact, the blame for lack of transparency by most political office holders in Nigeria could not be placed on them only, the share of the blame could also be laid at the doors of their family members, friends, political associates and neighbours who see them as fools and make them a laughing stock if they return without any material gains to show for their time in government. Transparency by those in government is the only way to secure the trust and confidence of people in whom sovereignty resides. Transparency implies open meetings, financial statements disclosure and freedom of information, budgetary review and audits. It means not hiding anything from the citizens, not engaging in shady deals or not making whimsical or discretionary decisions outside the ambit of laid down process<sup>xvii</sup>.

Most political office holders from the local level through the state to the federal level do not see transparency as a value. They see the positions they occupy as opportunity for them to amass wealth. Sometimes ago, the Federal Ministry of Finance through the Minister, Mrs Kemi Adeosun rolled out conditions for the second round of bailout to states owing their workers salary. The federal government has given 22 conditions for states to access the bailout fund. Some of the conditions are for those affected states to publish their audited financial statements within 9 months, publish budget implementation performance report online quarterly, quarterly financial meetings between the federal and state government to cover Value Added Tax (VAT), Pay As Your Earn (PAYE) remittances, refunds on Government projects, Paris Club and other accounts among others. Out of the 36 states, only few states met

the conditions<sup>xxviii</sup>. Many states could not meet up with the conditions because of their shady dealings. Monies given to states for developmental purposes and payment of salaries and pensions have been diverted as many civil servants in those states still complain of not being paid.

There are copious references in the Bible on the value of transparency. For example, in Ephesians 4:25 the Bible says: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members of one another." What makes it difficult for those in positions of authority in Nigeria to speak the truth is because of the shady dealings many of them are involved in. Also in 2 Corinthians 1:12 we have it that "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and Godly sincerity, not with fleshy wisdom, but by the grace of God....<sup>xxix</sup>" This passage is also buttressed by the words of Prophet Jeremiah where he says: "And they will deceive every of their neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongues to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity". It is as a result of the fact that political leaders have failed to lead by good example that makes the followers too to be corrupt. One will not be wrong therefore to say that a leader must exemplify the value of transparency in both his private and public dealings.

### **The Connection between Christian Ethical Values and Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

One important index for the development of any country is the development of the human personality. Development should be people centred. In other words, for there to be a sustainable development, the citizens of such country must be morally conscious of their actions. That is, both the leaders and the led must develop morally. A nation that is abundantly blessed with both human and natural resources but morally sick cannot achieve any greatness. This is because; the moral

standing of citizens in a country determines the physical development of such a nation. As the case with Nigeria, both people at the helms of affair and the followers are morally sick and this has overtimes been responsible for the stunted growth and epileptic development of the nation. It is of a fact that the country is in dire need of physical development such as the provision of basic amenities for the citizens. But, of greater importance is the human dimension in the whole discourse<sup>xxx</sup>.

What we mean here is that sustainable development of any country is hinged on the development of human persons. That is, the moral maturity of the citizens leads to both human and physical development of such a country. A country cannot be said to develop, if its citizens especially the political leaders are morally underdeveloped and immature. Maintaining high Christian ethical values and bringing sustainable development in such a country in the real sense will be a very big challenge these days, when corruption is rampant; highly placed persons suffer from moral degradation, government officials toe the corruption line of their political bosses and the whole society is in chaos. Corruption undermines the trust and shared values that make the society work. The problem of corruption becomes endemic when those in government start to use money meant for the public for their own personal benefit<sup>xxxi</sup>. The moral development of the people in a nation is the fulcrum on which the physical development rests. The immoralities of the citizens are the greatest obstacles to the development of such nation. It will be practically difficult for Nigeria to experience a sustainable development, when its citizens are dishonest, fraudulent, pervert justice, rob Peter to pay Paul, do not exhibit the values of love, selfless service, when they embezzle public money meant for development, engage in corrupt practices and diversion of money for selfish gain with impunity.

It is on this note that we submit that if Nigeria is going to be great, there is the need for all stakeholders to be prepared to enforce the Christian values of transparency, honesty, social justice and love. It is only when those in government and the followers exemplify these values that the intended sustainable development will be achieved. However, achieving this requires the efforts of responsible, responsive and visionary leaders. Leaders who will be transparent and not secretive, just and not lawless and most importantly leaders who will serve the best interest of the people first, leaders who will not sacrifice human life for monetary profit. A leader whose leadership qualities must be steered only by their conscience, not through bribery and dishonesty. Though, leaders do not just emerge; their emergence comes from the followers. Leaders of today were followers of yester years. The followers have the responsibility of choosing better leaders, leaders who are heart –driven, leaders who identify with common man on the street and understand what the country needs at every level. Not leaders who are money-driven and do not understand or identify with common man. This is important since government exists to effect and sustain the total wellbeing of members of the society.<sup>xxviii</sup>

### **Recommendations**

To achieve a sustainable development will be a mirage, except the Biblical values of truthfulness, honesty, love, transparency and social justice become the watchwords of all Nigerians. In other words, we recommend a total revival of Christian ethical values above as guiding principles for all political office holders and followers. The church also has a great role to play in this direction. The church must be alive to their responsibility of raising a God fearing people. The purpose of the church is to transform lives and its leadership must make sure that they teach and

encourage members on the need to be honest, patriotic, loving, exhibit social justice and be truthful. In other words, we are therefore urged to live out our Christian virtues by showing love for God and all others we come in contact with.

The leadership of the church must make her members understand that power belongs to God and he gives it to whom He wishes. He removes and sets up kings (Political leaders) as and when he wishes. This then presupposes that any position of authority one occupies must be seen as delegated authority from God. (Dan 4:25). Therefore, bearing this in mind, our leaders must learn to be humble in all their dealings.

In a country like Nigeria that is bedeviled with corruption, Injustice, indiscipline, nepotism, materialism, religion and ethnic violence. Christianity should be able to exert a force and make contribution in creating moral standard and strong ethical foundation to clean our society of the present prevailing social ills. Christianity should be a force to reckon with in the task of maintaining and promoting a healthy society and a morally sound people.

Religious values should be given a place of pride in our national life. This is why we condemn in its entirety, the proposed action of the Federal Government to stop the teaching <sup>xxxiii</sup>religious subjects –Christian Religious Studies and Islamic and Arabic Studies in both Primary and Secondary schools across the nation. Any nation that desires progress and a sound sustainable development will not toil with moral life of its citizens. For them to do this, it suggests an attempt to plunge the Nigeria into a perpetual morally sick nation.

There is also the need for prospective political leaders and executive officers of ministries and parastatals to be screened for their moral records by religious leaders. This may be a little bit cumbersome but, it worked in the educational sector in the early 60's when

all prospective candidates for secondary schools had to collect character attestation letters from their church leaders. But, for this to be effective, the religious leaders must live up to moral standard expected of them.

Since religions generally and Christianity in particular is said to be a changing factor in the spiritual, political and social life of any society, and as it also serve as springboard for the inculcation and improvement of ethical values that are fundamental to political development, productivity and nation building, Christianity should educate its members to uphold the principles of peaceful co-existence, love and honesty in the society.

Christian leaders should be prepared to use their positions as spiritual leaders to infuse sound moral principles in the people, especially the youths in the church who should be properly guided from childhood if they must grow up as responsible and useful citizens in future. Hence, Proverbs 2:6 advises "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it". Also, Proverbs 29:27, advises further "discipline your child and he will give you rest. This is very important because a child who is well grounded in the word of God and fully indoctrinated will find it difficult to engage in corrupt activities when he finds himself in position of authority

Christian organizations should endeavour to organize seminars, conferences, workshops and so on for their members in government where importance of truth telling, honesty, dutiful, social justice, love, transparency and accountability will be taught and emphasized. If possible, magazines, monographs and journals on Christian values should be made available to members periodically.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to examine the importance of Christian ethical values of honesty,

transparency, social justice, love and truthfulness as indexes for a sustainable development in Nigeria. Without doubt, the menace of corruption and embezzlement of public fund by those in positions of authority has been the major hindrance to the nation developmental process since independence. The paper then emphasized the fact that absence of Christian ethical values among political office holders and followers is responsible for many problems in the country. This paper therefore concluded that in order to have a sustainable development in Nigeria, there is the need for those in the authority to exemplify the Christian ethical values listed above for the society to be a better place to live.

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