

An Exposition of the Negation of Social Morality in Governance by the Nigerian Leadership

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(Received: 11-11-16 / Accepted: 9-3-17)

Abstract

The paper examines social morality in the context of the Nigerian society, so as to ascertain the relevance or otherwise of this concept and idea to the leadership of the country. The paper observes that as a result of the negation of social morality in governance by the Nigerian leadership, the real dividends of democracy have not been delivered to the generality of the Nigerian masses as exemplified by high unemployment rate, lack of adequate infrastructures and social amenities and the like. This situation is not unconnected with some vices that have almost become norms in the Nigerian body polity such as: high levels corruption and greed, nepotism, squandering instincts, primitive accumulation by the elites, indiscipline and the like. This ugly situation has informed the study. Despite all our enormous human and natural resources, Nigeria has largely remained one of the poorest countries on earth, being at the bottom of developmental indices. These vices have become the bane to all our developmental aspirations as individuals and as a collective in the Nigerian society. The study used secondary sources and participant observation and it is basically expository in nature, but also used the analytical methodology. Some of the recommendations of the paper are as follows: the Nigerian leadership should always imbibe the theory and praxis of social morality in governing the country in order to ensure that the much expected growth and development in all ramifications are achieved and same distributed based on equity, as individuals and as a collective, we as Nigerians should always play out the fulcrum of the principle of social morality, based on the golden rule of do unto others what one would want others to do to us so as to fulfil the reason why every society or political society is formed, the Nigerian leadership should with renewed vigour devote more time, resource and energy to duty, honesty, efficiency and the like in order to develop the Nigerian society to an enviable heights that would be the envy of the comity of developed nations, amongst others. The paper ends with a conclusion.

Keywords: Exposition, Negation, Social Morality, Governance, and the Nigerian Leadership.

1. Introduction

According to Madu (1997:74), man is also essentially a socio-religious animal endowed with rationality. Apart from being a social animal, according to Aristotle cited in Idike (2002: 2), man is also a political animal and a rational being. He has the urgent necessity to maintain peace, order, control and stability in the society where he lives with others, in order that he will enjoy life, liberty and happiness which are the ultimate ends of his brief earthly existence. Man believes that he can only live his life fully in a well ordered and peacefully organized society.

How well he can organize his society is the problem of social and political philosophy. This problem of social and political philosophy is the problem of the ideal state. The establishment of such an ideal state has led great thinkers among mankind to perennial yearning towards evolving many theories in social and political philosophy.

Man remains always a political animal and can only realize himself fully in a well-organized political society. How well organized or he could organized his political society is the problem of the ideal society. But, that the establishment of an ideal political society has always eluded man is not as thought provoking as the fact that in his nature there is this yearning toward the ideal political society. This yearning has led him to evolve several methods and systems aimed at the ideal political society, as evident in the numerous philosophies of the political society we have in human history. It is part of human civilization to aim at the ideal; man is to set before himself the model for the best life (Nwoko, 1988: 1).

When one observes the life of men in Nigeria, one cannot fail to be struck by two facts: as a rule every man desires to have his own way, to behave and think as he likes, and at the same time everyone cannot have his own way because we live in a political society. The relationship of the individual members of the society with one another sometimes generates conflicts, which therefore needs regulation by the leadership of government. When a body of people is clearly organized as a unit for the purpose of government, then it is said to be a political society. The purpose of such a political society is that, there is a group of people called the leadership or government charged with the responsibility to make laws and enforce them. They claim obedience from the members of the society whom they govern. In addition, the leadership or government is the instrument by means of which the purpose (s) of the society is or are sought to be realized. The citizens' judgement of the leadership based on the happiness, expediency, well-being of whatever else we call it, is in the nature of human affairs the best thing (Appadorai, 1978: 3-4). This study is based on the Hobbesian theory of the state of nature. It is a theory of moral immaturity, a state in which the motivating force of action was self-interest (Omoregbe, 1998: 110). The analytical methodology has been adopted for the purpose of this study.

1.2 Conceptual Spade Works

The conceptual spade works are given below in order to understand the key concepts used in this paper. These conceptual spade works becomes the working definition for this paper.

1.2.1 Exposition

The *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English* defines it as a full explanation of a theory, plan etc (408).

1.2.2 Negation

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English*, the concept negation is the exact opposite of something or the act of causing something not to exist or to become its opposite (785).

1.2.3 Social Morality

Citing Gaus Kevin posits that, social morality is the basic framework for a cooperative and mutually beneficial social life and provides rules that we are required to act upon and which provide the basis for authoritative demands of one person addressed to another (social publicreason.net/2011/01/17/opr-chi1-social-morality). He defined social morality as: "the set of social-moral rules that require or prohibit action, and so grounds moral imperatives that we direct to each other to engage in, or refrain from, certain lines of conduct".

1.2.4 Governance

It describes the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. It involves the conduct of public affairs by public institutions, management of public resources, and guarantee the realization of human rights (Boh, 2008: 103).

1.2.5 The Nigerian Leadership

Welsh (1979: 18), defined leadership as the ability to mobilize human and natural resources in pursuit of specific goals. Chemers quoted in Daboh (2011: 93), described leadership as the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen. It can also be understood as getting things done through people. The leader is seen as the servant of the people, he gets work done through others but he does the service. He is to serve and not to be served; he is to give and not to be given the position of a leader, political or religious is not just an honour but an office with responsibility of service. It means that others expect you to take the responsibility of getting something done.

For the purpose of this study, the Nigerian leadership includes those at the head of various government ministries, agencies, and parastatals especially the heads of the different arms and tiers of government that make laws, interpret laws and take and implement decisions for the general well-being of the generality of the Nigerian masses irrespective of creed, ethnicity, location and the like.

1.3 What is the Concept Social Morality?

Society according to Omoregbe (1998: 108), exists to provide the basic needs of every member. This means that it is the duty of society to prevent the strong, greed and unscrupulous individuals from exploiting the weak and over-riching themselves at their expense. It is the moral duty of society to check the animal instinct and to ensure that every member of society gets a fair share of the goods which belongs to all and by implication, it is also the moral duty of society to ensure that every member contributes his or her own quota of labour towards its progress; everybody has to work to provide the goods of society and in return gets a fair share of the goods Any society that fails to do this fails to fulfil the purpose for which a society is formed.

He further asserts that in order that any society be able to make progress and fulfil the purpose for which it exists, the individual members that constitute it must adopt and cultivate a certain basic moral disposition. The individual members must be morally matured if the society in which they live is to develop and progress. The moral maturity of the individuals members of a society is a *conditio-sine-qua-non*, a necessary condition for the development and progress of that society. Albert Schweitzer quoted in Omoregbe (1998: 109) says, “ that the prosperity of a society depends on the moral disposition of its members”.

Social morality is a moral philosophy which states that we live in a global-society with all of us being connected, none of us live in isolation. We have an effect on others, and others have an effect on us. It is simply doing the right thing, which we are already born knowing, with the basic principal of, act according to that maxim whereby we treat the world as an ends and never as a mere means (socialmorality.org/basics.asp).

Social morality has a useful function or role to play because as social animals, we are familiar with the usually large net benefits of living in social groups. Particularly for our ancestors, these include the benefits of self-interested association, such as more eyes to watch out for threats. Living in social groups also enables people to exploit the benefits of altruistic cooperation, such as might be instigated and maintained by acting according to, “do unto others what you would have them do unto you”. Altruistic cooperation is cooperation maintained by individuals acting at a cost to themselves, for the benefits of others, and without consideration of possible future net benefits for themselves (forums.philosophyforums.com/threads/the-function-of-social-morality).

In a nutshell, some moral principles govern how we treat each other. This is social morality. It includes standards like: the golden rule- respect the conscience of others as one desire them to respect your conscience, the zero aggression principle- do not thread on others. Certain features mark social morality such as: coordination and cooperation, extension and restraint of our aims, not instrumental, imperatival, prescriptive, and non-ontological.

1.4 The Contemporary Scenario that Negates Social Morality in Nigeria

The contemporary scenario Nigerian is one that negates the principle and practice of social morality. Omoregbe (1998: 109) is of the view that it is simply an illusion to talk of development in any society whose members lack moral maturity and social responsibility, for moral laxity and irresponsibility on the part of the members of any society is an obstacle, the greatest obstacle to the development of that society. This scenario has become increasingly prevalent in the Nigerian society where the leadership has thrown morality in winds in the handling of governmental affairs that have direct and indirect bearings on the wellbeing of the Nigerian masses. Achebe (1986: 1) posits that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely, a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate, water or air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility and to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.

Omoregbe (1998: x-xi), observes that the political society called Nigeria, in contemporary times has become increasingly difficult, insecure and abound with unhappiness. The country has manifestations that show that she is an immoral society and by implication a sick society. By an immoral society we mean a society permeated with corruption, dishonesty, fraud, selfishness, embezzlement of public funds and other immoral acts. The country can only be cured through a moral regeneration. Indeed, such regeneration is imperative if she is to make

any meaningful progress in development. He states that when we say that a society is morally sick, we mean of course that the individual members of the society are sick. For a society is made up of individual members and apart from these individuals there is no other entity that can be called a society. Hence, the moral sickness of a society is the moral sickness of the individual members of the society, and they are to start from the individual members. It is clear to all right thinking Nigerians that the basic problem of the country is a moral one. This moral problem, which is basically the problem of corruption, is the root cause of all our social, political and economic problems. Nigeria is a country richly endowed by God with both natural and human resources, which are enough to make the country great and make life in it comfortable for all her citizens.

But, unfortunately, Nigeria is one of the most corrupt countries in the world, a country permeated with corruption in every sector, from government circles, government institutions, parastatals to the private sector and other fraudulent practices by government officials are common features dotting every page of our national history since independence. In the light of this deplorable moral situation in the country, it is not at all surprising that the economy of the country eventually collapsed, resulting in unprecedented suffering for our people. No economy can subsist under such circumstances for any length of time without eventually collapsing, no matter how buoyant. Our efforts to revive our ailing economy could be short-lived or ever futile if we do not tackle the problem from its moral roots—corruption. Efforts to cure the symptoms of a disease are futile so long as the disease itself which is the cause of the symptoms remains untouched. No ailing economy can be successfully revived and restored to health in an atmosphere that is saturated with corruption (Omoregbe, 1998: xi-xii).

The Nigerian leadership observably have been the worst culprit of corruption and to that extent the kernel of the problem. The Nigerian leadership is seen and perceived by many as the nexus of corruption in the country as aptly captured by the *Centre of Advanced Social Sciences* cited in Akpotor (2003: 355), which gives credence to the position of Achebe, adumbrates that:

The problem is that the leadership which is needed to defeat corruption is the core of the problem in Nigeria. It is the leadership that has contributed most to the lowering of the moral tone of the Nigerian political society [sic]. It is in the leadership that corruption thrive most, wasting resources we need, defeating all prospects of patriotism and turning all of us into hardened cynics with no concern for the public good, no faith in public morality or its possibilities.

St. Aquinas quoted in Omoregbe (1998: 127-30), postulates that justice is so essential to government that without justice there can be no government. Any group of people who come together to form a government without justice is a group of grievances on a large scale. In other word, once morality is taken away from government we do not have government any more.

Politics in Nigeria since independence has generally followed the Machiavellian line of separating politics from morality. Nigerian politicians think that the best way to be successful in politics is to use immoral means to grab power or to retain it.

The result of separating politics from morality as a result of following the Machiavellian principle is that: most elections are not free and fair. All elections we have been conducting since independence have been sham, with their outcome manipulated; we have never really practiced democracy even though we have been deceiving ourselves and the outside world that we are practicing democracy because we do not have democratic principles and attitude; we have never had political stability in this country since independence; honesty and accountability have been thrown away in both private and public life as a result our governments have been made up of treasury looters, men who came to politics primarily or

even solely to enrich themselves by looting the treasury without qualm of conscience (Omoregbe, 1998: 131-32).

Giving credence to the above viewpoint, Odunze quoted in Udofia (2011: 151) says the moral standard of many Nigerians in all areas of human existence is terribly very low and undersirable. There has been in recent times, a very loud outcry through the mass media and some religious organizations against the ever increasing moral laxity in the Nigerian society. Moral decadence is found in almost all aspects of the nation's life. It is seen daily in the corrupt, overbearing and shameless traffic warden, the official in the motor licensing office who treats no file unless bribe is offered him.

Furthermore, Achebe cited in Udofia (2011: 151), in the armed robbers who make the highways unsafe for travelling, attacking public institutions like banks in broad daylight and sacred institutions like the churches at night; in poor leadership as Nigerian leaders so far are unable and unwilling to rise to the challenge of leading by personal example which is said to be the hallmark of true leadership; in the pen robbers whose prime ambition is to steal so much from the nation's coffers. In addition, in the depraved lecturers who demand to sleep with female students before they pass his course, in the young woman who merchandises themselves for money; in the wicked politician who employs youths to kidnap, kill and destroy their opponents and their property; and in the fake prophets who destroy peoples' homes and mislead many with their false prophecy. The decadence in Nigeria is graphically painted by the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria quoted in Udofia (2011: 151) thus:

Our country continues to suffer under the weight of corruption and our people live in fear because of insecurity of life and property. The evil of corruption has made us an impoverished people inhabiting a land of immense riches. The level of poverty in our land and the problem of insecurity go hand in hand. Strike actions embarked upon by numerous associations and unions in the country, are further signals of a country in distress and in dire need of direction when huge sums of money allocated for the provision of infrastructure end up in the pockets of a few, the collapse of infrastructure has a negative impact on economic activities. When the economy is in turmoil, millions of young Nigerians cannot be gainfully employed. Perceiving their country, Nigeria, as a country that dashes their hopes, many of such young people end up on payroll of people who arm to be political thugs, kidnappers or armed robbers. Many others are used even by state and local governments in this country to extort money from Nigerians such the travelling from one local government area to another has become a nightmare, corruption breeds poverty, poverty breeds insecurity and greater poverty.

The Nigerian leadership over the past decades, most often than not does not take its duties, obligations or promises seriously and one can arguably say makes it an irresponsible leadership, one that lacks credibility and such a government cannot guarantee social morality in governance and by implication cannot deliver the real dividends of democracy in form of good and adequate social amenities, infrastructures and the like.

2. Recommendations

Some of the recommendations of this paper that can help in restoring social morality in governance by the Nigerian leadership are as follows:

- i. The Nigerian leadership should always imbibe the theory and praxis of social morality in governing the country in order to ensure that the much expected growth and development in all ramifications are achieved and same distributed based on equity and justice.

ii. As individuals and as a collective, Nigerians should always play out the fulcrum of the principle of social morality, based on the golden rule of do unto others what one would want others to do to us so as to fulfil the reason why societies or political societies are formed.

iii. Social morality should be cultivated and enshrined in the body polity by the Nigerian Leadership at all levels and tiers so as to overcome the myriad of problems that have plagued the country in contemporary times as a result of the negation of social morality.

iv. The Nigerian leadership should with renewed vigour devote more time, resources and energy to duty, honesty, efficiency and the like in order to develop the Nigerian society to an enviable heights that would be the envy of the comity of developed nations.

3. Conclusion

Politics involves the art of organizing men in a society to live and interact with each other to the full realization of their social nature. It requires the institutionalization of the social structures, such as the establishment of legal and governmental systems to facilitate this interaction. These institutions in turn organized and consolidate the people for law as a governed, independent, defined sovereign territory- a political society. Politics deals with the political society or state in its rational and legal nature as an association of men as moral beings (Nwoko 2).

Omoregbe (1998:108), adumbrates in the final analysis that, society has a moral obligation to fulfil the purpose for which it exists that is to cater for the basic needs of all its members. Any society that allows a few unscrupulous and greedy individuals to accumulate to themselves most of its wealth thereby leaving the vast majority in poverty-lacking even the most basic needs of life, is seriously failing in its moral duty. To say that it is the duty of society to ensure that every individual member gets a fair share of its goods implies, of course, that it is also the duty of society to ensure that every member contributes their quota of labour towards its progress; everybody has to work to provide the goods of society and in return gets his or her fair share of the goods. It is therefore the duty of society to provide every member with a job and to cater for his or her basic needs. Any society that fails to do this fails to fulfil the purpose for which a society is formed and invariably, this negates social morality.

In the process of organising the people as a collective for the realization of the purpose of coming together as a political society, the Nigerian leadership over the years have negated the principle and practice of social morality. This negation could be seen in the low levels of infrastructural and structural development, lack of adequate social amenities and the like that have come to plague all the developmental aspirations of the contemporary Nigerian society, as individuals and as a collective, even in the midst of abundant human and natural resources.

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