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BEYOND OPUTA HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION
COMMISION: TRADOCHRISLAM REPENTANCE
COMMISION AS A KEY TO NATIONAL REBIRTH

BY

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a contribution to the National Rebirth debate, which presupposes that Nigeria is plagued by some problems. The paper examines the solutions that have been proffered for solving our social problems like the reintroduction of Nigerian customary values, adoption of a national religion, secular state and the anti-corruption bill and found them inadequate for a true National Rebirth. The paper therefore suggests repentance from sin as a precondition for National Rebirth.

INTRODUCTION

After the inauguration of the present democratic government, a Human Rights violation investigation Commission was set up by the Federal Government and its terms of reference was to inter-alia reconcile parties on any dispute brought before it beyond reconciliation is the issue of national rebirth which resupposes that Nigeria is plagued by some social problems like high crime rate of which the most prevalent is bribery and corruption. It is my belief that all the solutions proffered to the problem like social security system and most recently the anti-corruption bill cannot solve the problem. They cannot lead Nigerians to a renewal of spirit. National rebirth without genuine repentance from sin is a waste of time. Therefore in this paper, I suggest the setting up of a body to be known as Tradochislam Repentance Commission. The commission should comprise three representatives from each of the religions being practice by Nigerians. The commission should declare a National Repentance day and every Nigerian citizen should confess his or her sins. It is my belief that if we all confess our sins and ask God for forgiveness, it will be well with Nigeria. This is the beginning of National Rebirth.

DEFINITION OF TERMS:

Tradochislam Repentance Commission

This is a commission that is representative of the major religions being practiced by Nigerians-Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion.

Chris-Christianity or adherents of the Christian faith, representative of the Christian faith.

Islam – Muslim or adherents of the Islamic faith or representatives of the Muslims.

Trado-African Traditional Religion, adherents of African Traditional Religion, representatives of African Traditional Religion. With the above combination we can arrive at Tradochislam Representance commission. Let me quickly point our that apart from the above-mentioned religions there are some other religions being practiced by some Nigerians-Gurumaharaji, Harekhrishma, Eckankar etc. they should be represented on the commission so that their adherents could repent according to their religious beliefs. Concerning the headship of the commission we suggest the rotation system.

National Rebirth

The Advanced Learners Dictionary defines rebirth to mean “a renewal of life, change of spirit”. This definition emphasizes the spiritual dimension to any human problem. That is why we are suggesting repentance from

sin by all Nigerians so that a meaningful National rebirth can be achieved.

Repentance

The Advanced Learners Dictionary defines repentance to mean, "sorrow for wrong doing" (n).

To repent (v) is to be sorry for wrong doing

To be repentant (a) is to feel or show

Sorrow for wrongdoing.

Literature Review

Some extant works exist on the issue of moral regeneration in Nigeria. Commenting on the high level of moral decadence in Nigeria. Abogunrin (1994) quoted Billy Graham as saying.

Our world is on fire, and man
Without God will never be able to control the flames.
The demons of hell have been let
Loose. The fires of passion,
Greed, hate and lust are Sweeping the world.
We seem to be plunging madly toward Armagedon.

Writing on bribery and corruption which form part of the social ills plaguing Nigeria Sofola (1994) noted that corruption is a deliberate action for which there is extraneous consideration, which could be in cash or kind. The cash or gift or other inducements represents

extraneous considerations, which is used to pervert action or judgement in favour of a person or groups, is bribe. The act itself is bribery.

By its nature bribery and corruption negate the set goals of our society and make the achievement of the set goals difficult. It prevents egalitarianism and the giving of equal opportunities to all citizens. It does not make for the achievement of a human society where there is justice and where no man is oppressed. It does not make for the achievement of an altruistic value of man being his brother's keeper. It militates against the good and the right as defined by our society. It is an interruption in the socially expected or morally desired goals of our society.

Sofola (1994) went further to identify causes of bribery and corruption as follows. Internal sources, external and universalistic sources and lack of security.

Internal Sources:

He made reference to the philosophy, beliefs, and customs of our society. For example altruism is a belief in which one caters for the common good of all, just as appreciation is usually expressed and shown for good deeds done to an individual or group in our society. When a favour is done to a person he is expected morally to show an appreciation. In fact, one is encouraged to do more for a person who

appreciates good deeds. Such appreciation can be shown in the form of gift – giving, visiting and so forth. But whatever the form, a distinction must be made between an appreciation shown after a deed has been done and one shown before the deed is done. The crux of the matter is that the latter could not pass for an appreciation. It is an inducement.. it is bribery; any thought to the contrary is a rationalized perversion.

While it is true it is customary to give thanks and show appreciation for good deeds, it is also recognized that giving a gift such as money, before a deed is rendered automatically induces the receiver to some act. This is corruption. The society frowns at this act and both the giver and the receiver are generally considered to be corrupt.

External and Universalistic Sources of Corruption:

The world is now a global village. The interaction amongst people of the world can be on individual, inter-governmental and inter-racial levels. Foreign powers use various means including bribery to get what they want in Africa. Through contracts they induce some Africans to accept corrupt practices.

Other factors of external origin are the African leaders wetted appetites for materialism, which usually follows their interaction with the highly materialistic western society. The West has also created a system of numbered Nigerian bank accounts in Switzerland where monies

siphoned from the coffers of African governments are offered as bribes can be kept without anybody knowing the owner at a glance.

Lack of Security:

An insecure person develops the tendency to make the best use of available opportunities open to him. Unless African countries can develop a system of education, which sets out, to reassess and counteract materialistic values, efforts aimed at reducing or eliminating corruption and allied vices would remain impossible. An educational system which does not guarantee accommodation, job opportunity, health facility adequate participation in government, adequate leisure sense of belonging and political awareness for all and sundry would only be begging the solution to the problem of corruption and other vices.

The fact that I have emphasized bribery and corruption as social problems does not mean that there are no other social problems. Crime is a social problem and not all sins are classified under the criminal code. An offence can be a sin and at the same time a crime. In many religions, an act, which the members believe is in violation of a divine law, is referred to as sin. If an act is defined as a sin by a religious organization and if the same act is defined as a crime by the criminal law, then the same act would be a sin and a crime. Theft is both a sin and a crime in Nigeria in this regard. In the Christian religion, a person who covets his neighbour's property has sinned, but such a person has not violated the

criminal law. Sin and crime therefore two different concepts both applying to disapproved behaviour but receiving their meaning from different sources (Sofola 1994).

What is a Crime?

Ikewun (1994) quoted Radelet, who defined crime as a kind of human behaviour that is deviant by certain established standards of authority in society. Simply put, crime is an act or omission which renders the person committing the act or making the omission punishable by the law.

Causes of Crime

Ikewun (1994) has identified some contributory factors to crime in Nigeria.

- a) Unemployment
- b) Aimless drift to cities by unqualified young men and women.
- c) The urge for material wealth.
- d) Lack of social services and amenities in the rural areas.
- e) Lack of industries to absorb school leavers.
- f) Retirement and retrenchment.
- g) Broken homes.
- h) Bad company.

Going by social problems listed above one can rightly justify the imperative of National Rebirth. Does it mean that no solution has been

proffered to these social problems? No some solutions have been proffered but they are inadequate.

Sofola (1994) has suggested a reintroduction or redefinition of Nigeria customary values to the masses, to reduce bribery and corruption. He also suggested a diagnosis of our social ills, which should determine the types of punishment to offenders.

Mala (1994) discussed the issue of national religion as a solution to Nigeria's myriad of social problems. He noted that it is practically impossible for Nigeria to have a national religion and that Christians and Muslims who have suggested a Christian state and a Muslim state respectively are not being realistic. What will happen to millions of the traditionalists in our midst. Are we suggesting a common front against the so-called "atheists"? How do we overcome the seemingly irreconcilable doctrines and practices of birth Muslims and Christians?

Mala (1984) also cited a purely secular state without religion as advocated by a few popular Nigerian intellectuals. According to Mala Nigerians are too religious and cannot at this state of our development welcome irreligiosity in our national life. The return – to – culture school of thought according to Mala is bound to collapse in spite of the efforts of the government and the mass media in promoting it. The Olusegun Obasanjo led democratic government recently passed into law, the anti-corruption bill. However it is the belief of most Nigerians that

the anti-corruption law is a toothless bulldog – it can only bark, it cannot bite because our leaders themselves are corrupt. They have refused to remove the particles from their own eyes before asking others to do so. Crime is not something that can be decreed or outlawed out of existence. It is innate in man. The Psalmist confirms this in 51:5 “I was sharpened in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me”

The above solutions are inadequate and that is why we are suggesting repentance from sin as a solution to the moral problems in which Nigeria is wallowing.

Is repentance a sine qua to rebirth? Yes. Nigerians cannot achieve national rebirth without genuine repentance from sin.

“Righteousness” says the Bible “exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to people”

Repentance in Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion.

Repentance in Islam (Tawba)

The Holy Quran enjoins Muslims to repent of their sins. If a Muslim repents of his sin it will be better for him. Surah 9 v. 3 supports this point:

And a proclamation from Allah and messenger to all men on the day of the greater pilgrimage that Allah is free from obligation to the idolaters (so is) His messenger. So if ye repent it will be better for you; but if you avise then, know that ye cannot Escape Allah. Give tiding (O Muhammad of a Painful doom to those who disbelieve.

After a Muslim might have repented of his or her sins he is enjoined to be truthful and associate with the truthful:

O ye who believe be careful of your duty to Allah and be with the truthful (9: 119).

Repentance in Christianity:

According to the Psalmist “the sacrifice accepted to God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17).

It is this type of heart that can accept the New-Testament message of confessing our sins and accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. In St. Paul's letter to the Roman he mentioned that we cannot continue in sin and expect grace to abound (Rom. 6:2). He therefore enjoined. Christians not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Repentance in African Traditional Religion:

Awolalu (1976) listed three methods by which sin could be removed namely:

- i. Purification
- ii. Confession and Reparation
- iii. Sacrifice

The second method will serve our purpose.

Confession and Reparation:

According to Awolalu, (1976) this implies acknowledging and declaring one's sin to a priest or to someone wronged and where the need arises making amends.

Common Grounds for Repentance in Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion

The conceptual polarity in repentance from the perspectives of the three major religions in Nigeria notwithstanding, the three religions still agree that sin-separates man from God and brings consequences on

the society, they also agree that repentance from sin can restore the relationship between man and God.

Since repentance means sorrow for wrong doing, rebirth which is a renewal of life or change of spirit cannot be achieved by Nigerians if we do not first of all repent from our sins because every human act is conceived from the spirit. It is on this basis that we are recommending genuine repentance from sin as capable of leading Nigeria on the path of National Rebirth for a greater Nigeria.

Problems and Prospects of Tradochislam Repentance Commission.

The prospect of repentance in contributing to solving the social problems in which Nigeria is wallowing is bright. Christians might find it difficult agreeing on who to represent them because of lack of unity among the Christian denominations.

Muslims are not likely to have such a problem because of the relative unity that exist among the Islamic groups. Adherents of African Traditional Religion are also not likely to have problem selecting representatives because unlike Islam and Christianity, it has no interest in conversion. Another problem is religious particularism. Every religion claims to be the only way to salvation and only true religion. In a

situation where Muslims and Christians start making particularist claim on the issue of repentance they should be reminded or educated on the multi-religiosity of the Nigerian nation which is constitutionally guaranteed.

Conclusion:

In this paper, we have examined the issue of National Rebirth. We stated that rebirth is impossible without repentance. We also justified the need for rebirth laying emphasis on the social problems plaguing the Nigerian society. The suggested solutions to the social ills Nigeria is bedeviled with are in our judgement inadequate. We therefore suggest the cleansing of the human spirit from sin as a precondition for the National Rebirth.

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