
Honesty: A Beacon of Hope for the Future of Good Governance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores that Nigeria as a country since independence has suffered and is suffering from lack of honest governance which gives room for people to think and even close their minds on the fact that the hope for the future good governance in Nigeria is highly improbable. Yet this essay advocates that honesty and trustworthiness serve as the bedrock of every political leadership in Nigeria and beyond. It also argues that honesty serves as a symbol of hope for the future good governance in Nigeria, and this can only be achieved when honest people who derive their values and principles of honesty from the right source (i.e. God) are on leadership. This then calls for people with the right perspective on honesty to engage in politics for the concretization of future hope of good Governance in Nigeria as a nation.

INTRODUCTION

Permit me to begin this exploration with the book of the beginnings (Genesis) which gives us the origin of the downfall⁵⁶³ of man in all aspects of life. Man has fallen from the standard which God placed him, he has a dead conscience, and every inclinations of the thought of his heart is evil all the time (Gen. 6:5). This is actually what set the entire world into chaos,

⁵⁶³ Genesis 3 gives us the account of the fall of man. it gives a narrative of how the serpent converse with Eve in the Garden of Eden to the extent of convincing her telling her “you will not surely die . . . for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will opened, and you will be like God knowing good and evil.” Ironically their eyes opened to the devastating consequences of evil

corruption is always on the increase, and conflicts of all kinds are the order of the day. People have no trust and cannot be trusted, people become self-centered, gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil, they disobey their parents, they are senseless, faithless, heartless and ruthless” (Romans 1:29-31).⁵⁶⁴ This truth is found in all ramifications of man’s life, in both private and public life, both political and religious life. As a result of this human condition, the world at large lacks good leadership and governance, the leaders are not honest, and they lack integrity. They promote their interests instead of promoting the interest of the masses. Furthermore, as a consequence of this endless escalation of evil, one could imagine hearing the voices of the poor, least privileged and the nobodies crying for justice, and honest governance where they could be treated with fairness, honesty and a good sense dignity, crying for a world where people could be treated justly regardless of social, economic and financial status.

Most of the countries of the world have in one time or the other experienced such kind of situation, while some are still suffering from it. Therefore, it should be noted that Nigeria as a country is not an exception because the reality of a government suffering from dishonesty and lack of integrity and trustworthiness is a well-known phenomenon in the political journey of Nigeria as a nation since independence. This virus has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian system of governance to the extent of depriving the country from achieving the goals for which it was established. As such, a critical reconsideration of the Nigerian situation brings one to a state of skepticism of whether there is ever hope for the future good governance. This is a prevailing reality that instigate the choice of this topic because it is timely and factual. Moreso, this essay aims at underscoring that honesty is needed in Nigeria

⁵⁶⁴ Remember that this describes people without Christ or those who did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God and even though they know the decrees of God and what he desires, they persist in doing evil, not only doing it, but approve those who do it.

because it could serve as a beacon of hope for the future good governance in Nigeria. Now to the Nigerian governance and the challenge of honesty we turn.

NIGERIAN GOVERNANCE AND THE CHALLENGE OF HONESTY

Let me begin this section by defining what honesty and governance mean for a better understanding of the subject under question. I want to see “honesty” as the quality of being truthful in all areas of life. In other words, he who is honest, knows the truth, lives the truth, speaks the truth and also shares the truth with those around him. He is someone who is uncorrupt, not dubious in his character, not crooked in his ways and uncompromising in his decisions. Furthermore, honesty is synonymous to integrity which L.W.J Huberts sees as “the quality of acting in accordance with relevant moral values, norms, and rules.”⁵⁶⁵ Other perspectives on integrity also suggest that Integrity is about “moral” norms and values, those that refer to what is right or wrong, good or bad. The features also refer to a general consent with relevance for everyone in the same circumstances that relates to “valid” moral values and norms.⁵⁶⁶ So I want to see honesty or integrity as something that has to do with life and character of a person, thus a person’s life and character are mutually inclusive. Now turning to the concept of governance, it would be understood that governance is nowadays a popular concept that relates to power; authority; politics; policy; administration; government; steering; management; and organization (Bevir, 2009;⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁵ L.W.J Huberts, “Integrity: What it is and Why it is Important” *Public Integrity* Vol. 20, no. 1 (2018): 18-32.

⁵⁶⁶ M., Kaptien and J. Wampe, *The Balance Company: A Theory of Corporate Integrity* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2002), 40.

⁵⁶⁷M. Bevir, *Key Concept in Governance* (London: Sage, 2009),

Fukuyama, 2016;⁵⁶⁸ Kettl, 2015;⁵⁶⁹ Kjaer, 2004;⁵⁷⁰ Rose-Ackerman, 2017⁵⁷¹). However, in this article governance is seen as “authoritative policy-making on collective problems and interests and implementation of these policies,”⁵⁷² thus integrating honesty and governance would help us underline that, it is all about authoritative policy making on collective problems and interest and implementation of these policies based on the truth as defined by the moral norms, values and laws that govern a given people, society or country.

Nigeria as a nation got her independence since 1960 as we all know with the thought that when the indigenous people are in leadership, things would be better and there would be a rapid development in every nook and corner of the country. They thought that the indigenous people could offer good governance to the citizens of the country. They promised to be faithful, loyal and honest which they always declare in the national pledge because they knew that for a country to achieve her desired goals must have leaders who are faithful, loyal and honest in all their dealings with regards to governance in the country. Furthermore, Any Nigerian who has ever said the national pledge has whether knowingly or unknowingly promised to be faithful loyal and honest to the country’s values, norms and rules that are based on the truth. This honesty talked about is not just honesty in the private, public, secular or religious arenas rather if it means anything, then it means honesty in terms of political issues. Our leaders are also part of those who have been promising to be faithful and honest in their

⁵⁶⁸ F. Fukuyama, “Governance: What do we Know and How do we Know it?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016): 89-105.

⁵⁶⁹ D. F. Kettl, *The Transformation of Governance: Public Administration for the Twenty-first Century* (Baltimore, MD: JHU Press, 2015)

⁵⁷⁰ A. M. Kjaer, *Governance: Key Concepts* (Cambridge, England: Polity, 2004)

⁵⁷¹ Rose-Ackerman, “What does Governance Mean?” *Governance* 30, (2017): 23-27.

⁵⁷² L.W. J. Huberts, *The Integrity of Governance: What it is, What we Know, What us Done, and Where to go* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 68.

governance, but the reverse is nonetheless becoming the fate of the country. It is interesting even though heart-aching to know that Nigerian governance has drastically falling from the standard of been honesty and faithful. This is imperative considering the prevailing corruption that has almost become a gangrene in the Nigerian system of governance.

Instead of taking the issue of honesty and bringing the national pledge into concretization, the Nigerian governance has rather taking the opposite (corruption⁵⁷³) to become her model. It is on this regard that Jerry Gana *et al* observed that, “Corruption has become a household word in the Nigerian society. It pervades all strata of the society—from the highest levels of the political and business elites to the ordinary person in the village.”⁵⁷⁴ Gana *et al* are surely on the right, simply because corruption has overtaken the country in so many ways. It is further salient to note that the absence of honesty is what brings about corruption, in other words, one could say, the the product of dishonesty as the opposite of honesty is corruption and anywhere there is the absence of honesty, corruption exists. Moreso, dishonesty or corruption is not the absence of honesty, rather the distortion and alteration of it. Gana *et al* continued to observe that Corruption and indiscipline are two of the most serious problems which have confronted the Nigerian political

⁵⁷³ With regard to the definitions of corrupt behavior, three views are given by Gana; thus the first, and most specific, interprets corruption as acting in a particularistic interest because of advantages promised or given and thus includes bribery (often found in legal frameworks) but also influence peddling, kickbacks, and forms of favoritism and conflict of interest. The second interprets corruption in line with the definitions in use by international anti-corruption organizations: corruption as the abuse of office for private gain (Pope, 2000; also central in the impressive work by Transparency International on the topic, including the Corruption Perception Index, <https://www.transparency.org/>). These definitions portray corruption as a breach of moral behavioral norms and values involving private interests but do not see the presence of a third party or interest as conditional (which brings fraud, theft, and embezzlement under the corruption “umbrella”). The third, and broadest, definition views corruption as synonymous with all types of wrongdoing by functionaries in terms of acting contrary to the public interest.

⁵⁷⁴ Jerry Gana *et al.*, edit. Reports of the Political Bureau March 1987, Abuja: MAMBER, 1987), 215.

process since independence.⁵⁷⁵ This is seen in the prevalence of examination malpractices in our educational institutions including universities (seminaries), the taking of bribes and pervasion of justice among the police and others on whose neck the pronouncements and administration of justice hang. At the village level, corruption manifests itself in such forms as adulteration of market goods or denting of measures to reduce their contents with a view to giving advantage to the seller etc.⁵⁷⁶

Another challenge that the Nigerian governance is facing is the inability of the leaders to be self-disciplined. Indiscipline in this context is considered to be closely related to corruption. In fact corruption is one of the greatest forms of indiscipline in this country, this shows itself in the Nigerians attitudes of refusing to obey even a simple procedures such as lining up in queues to enter buses or buy petrol, and lack of concern for the weak and others in trouble.⁵⁷⁷ Indiscipline of our leaders causes dishonesty in the Nigerian governance, they have not disciplined themselves to the extent of controlling their fleshy nature of materialism and as such, they always desire for more wealth and power thinking that it would give them the sense of security and fulfilment the need.

HONESTY: A SYMBOL OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

To begin with, Van Ryzin, said “integrity do really matter for “good governance.”⁵⁷⁸ As we have explored earlier that honesty is synonymous to integrity. It is paramount to know that honesty or integrity has all it takes to secure the future of good governance in Nigeria. In fact I want to say that there will be no good governance in Nigeria and beyond without honesty or

⁵⁷⁵ Gana, Reports of the Political Bureau, 215.

⁵⁷⁶ Gana, Reports of the Political Bureau, 215.

⁵⁷⁷ Gana, Reports of the Political Bureau, 216.

⁵⁷⁸ Van Ryzin, G. G., “Outcomes, process, and trust of civil servants.” *Journal of Public Administration Theory and Research*, 21(4), (2011). 745–760.

honest leaders on leadership. The Greens as an Australian organization in writing about politics believe that “integrity, accountability and openness in politics are vital to a healthy democracy.”⁵⁷⁹ Indeed any political journey that is based on integrity and openness would bring about good governance and it would lead to a development that the poor masses will benefit. Yet considering the importance of honesty in governance, Alison Berry Wilkinson argues that “honesty is the best policy.”⁵⁸⁰ By this, he means that in any government, when honesty is taken as the best policy and code of conduct for those on leadership, every unfaithfulness, untrustworthiness and corruption if not eradicated, would be greatly minimized which will then result to a good governance.

Honesty is all about the ethics of behavior, which refers to how a person behaves in the public with regard to a good sense of consideration for what is wrong and right to do for the benefit of all. While in relation to governance, it refers to the quality of good behavior in the process of good governance, hence refers to the moral quality of everyone involved in governance. Honesty stands against anything or anyone that violets the norms, values and ethics that guide a governing body for the benefits of all. It stands against possible conflicts of interest and favoritism (beyond bribing); misuse of information and power; intimidation and discrimination; and private time misbehavior. The future of good governance in Nigeria as a nation depends on the honesty and integrity of those on leadership, they should be able to be a kind of people who work not for their interests rather for the interest of those they lead. Just as Orlando saw it in Shakespeare’s play titled “As you like it” ‘good governance’

⁵⁷⁹ Christine Milne, “Good Government: Honesty & Integrity in Politics” *The Greens* (Canberra: Parliament House, 2018), 121-124.

⁵⁸⁰ Alison Berry Wilkinson, “Truth or Consequences: Choose the Road that Avoids Career Disaster” *Law Group* 200, (2014): 1-5.

entailed servants sweating for duty, not for food or promotion.⁵⁸¹

Furthermore, honesty has the ability of making the leaders or politicians in Nigeria to work for the public interest, this reminds one of the Spanish and South African code of conducts when it comes to good governance when they postulate that “decision-taking shall always seek to satisfy the general interests of citizens and shall be based on objective considerations focused on the common interest, regardless of any other factor implying personal, family, corporate, client-based positions or any others which might collide with this principle.”⁵⁸² honesty has the capability of making those on leadership while making decision to make them not on their selfish desires but making it for the interest of the general public which would treat every citizen equally; this would also help leaders to maintain political loyalty, with transparency, in neutrality, with impartiality, effectiveness, in accountability and legality. But yet this honesty cannot be actualized without having people who have the right perspective of honesty because there are some instances where the word “honesty” could be defined relatively based on the background or religious indoctrination of a person in context.

A CALL FOR HONEST PEOPLE IN NIGERIAN POLITICS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

Calling for honest people to take part in Nigerian politics is not a new phenomenon in the world of politics. Countries who have enjoyed ample time of good governance have discovered that having the right people in leadership is tantamount to having a good governance that brings about minimization or eradication

⁵⁸¹ Torben Beck Jorgensen and Dette Sorensen, “Code of of Good Governance: National or Global Public Values? *Public Administration 2*.

⁵⁸² International Institute for Democratic and Electoral assistance, *Codes of Conduct: Ethical and Professional Administration of Elections* (March, 1997) retrieved from <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/code-conduct-ethical-and-professional-administration-elections> on 24th, Dec., 2023.

of corruption as the violation of honesty and integrity. It should be noted however, that it is only an incorruptible heart and mind that can minister corruption free governance. In other words, it is only the honest can administer and maintain honesty in both public and private domains. Having a reflection on the biblical conception of the subject matter would help one to discover that, honesty is seen as righteousness, and we do know that God is the only one who makes people righteous, therefore, for one to be righteous and in other words, honest, one must be connected to God the true source of all righteousness and honesty.

This then point us to the notion that the Nigerian governance needs people who are connected to God through Christ, through whom are possess all it takes to be honest trustworthy and responsible, who is the right source of honesty and righteousness if really there is need for good governance in Nigeria. This further point us to the unfortunate mission of the non-Christians in terms of dominating the political terrain, thinking that they could administer justice and honest governance to everyone in the country (according to their own understanding and conception of honesty).⁵⁸³ Let me say this at this point that there will never be good governance without honest people in the political territory and there will never be real and honest people (in the true sense of the world) in the entire world without having people who are connected to God the sources of true honesty. As such, the ground breaking work of Zamani B. Kafang serves as a good point of departure in

⁵⁸³ The non-Christians particularly the Muslims are always on the move to take the Nigerian and even the world leadership as their own inherited affair (I supposed based on critical observation as a Nigerian citizen by birth). They tried doing this in all aspects of their daily endeavors, they think that if they come on throne, there will be fairness and justice (even though they considered their brothers in faith the only deserved beneficiaries of the goods of governance), they think that peace will reign in every nook and corner of the country and the world at large. it is however my opinion that even if they are the only people in the world, they cannot administer justice and fairness to themselves, they cannot be honest and maintain peace between themselves simply because they do not have the right and true source of honesty and righteousness.

terms of calling for honest people to engage in politics. In his book, he gave a clarion call on the Nigerian Christians to come to terms with the idea that their engagement in politics is an issue of necessity not a matter of choice holding to the present reality of how politics in Nigeria has become. Kafang knew fully well that Nigeria as a nation needs people with the right mindset, attitude, concept and value systems to be in politics if really good governance is to be experienced. To this end, he advised that Christians should engage as ambassadors and witnesses of Christ and his kingdom in the political arena.⁵⁸⁴

Therefore, this call is meant for true Christians to be engaged in politics because having them in politics helps in administering good governance in Nigeria as a nation. It is good also for Christians to have a biblical perspective on good governance which would guide their approach and behaviors in political affairs. In addition, we have had instances where even the so-called⁵⁸⁵ Christians do misbehave and lost track when in politics. To this we say, any Christian who is engaged in politics should keep focus not to be derailed by the uneasiness of the political circumstances of the Nigerian governance. Rather they should “be strong and very courageous [to be careful to obey the truth] not to turn away from it to the right or to the left that [they] may be successful wherever they go. It further means to stand for the truth, speak the truth, live the truth and abide by the truth which serves as the ultimate weapon of fighting corruption, dishonesty, and imbalances faced by the Nigerian governance. Christians must stand and make a difference no matter how little it is.

CONCLUSION

⁵⁸⁴ Zamani B. Kafang, *Christians' Integrity and Politics in Nigeria* (Kaduna, Nigeria: Zoe Graphics, 2011), 17.

⁵⁸⁵ I use this term intentionally to refer to people who profess Christ with their mouths but their actions betray their confessions. These are the kind of people of whom Apostle Paul wrote to his Spiritual son Titus in 1:16 saying, “they claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Honesty as a beacon of future good governance in Nigeria is nothing but the truth of the matter. No good governance without honesty and no true honesty without a good connection with the right and true source of honesty. Honesty stands as the best policy if really, we want to experience the good governance that we have been dreaming about, yearning for and anticipating in Nigeria. Good people with the right motive, right character, right objectives and the right knowledge of political ethics need to come into the scene of Nigerian politics in order to change the game and bring about the maintenance of honesty and integrity in the Nigerian governance for the benefit of all at all times and in all places.

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