

The Role of Good Conscience in Abating Bad Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper aims at mitigating bad governance in Nigeria through the instrumentality of good conscience. Using the analytic method of research and Chicago documentation style, this paper studies the logical claims of conscience as a strong factor enough to abate the adverse effect of bad governance in Nigeria. The findings of this paper show that there is a fundamental lack in the use of conscience and this condition is a portentous sign of bad governance. Hence a good use of conscience leads to good governance manifest in rule of law, transparency, accountability, good citizenship, national peace, security and development in Nigeria. On appraisal, the research reveals that a bold use of good conscience is a sure and an auspicious means of mitigating the effects and eradicating the dictates of bad governance in Nigeria. Hence, it is timely that Nigerians say no to this threateningly inauspicious monster of bad governance by developing good conscience and society-oriented conscience lest the present experience eats up the entity called Nigeria. In conclusion, this paper makes it obvious that good conscience is an indispensable factor and propitious to good governance, peace and national security. Therefore, this paper makes a clarion call on Nigerians to form good conscience and obey the binding force of such conscience in order to save our jinxed nation from damnation.

Key words: Conscience, Governance, Insurgency, National

Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

Governance in Nigeria has become indescribable for the reason that words are not good enough to qualify the present degree of bad governance. The situation is characterized by impunity, embezzlement of public fund, consciencelessness, disregard to the rule of law, non implementation of budget, looting of public funds, lawlessness, deliberate lies to deceive the masses, election fraud e.t.c. It is obvious that bad governance has declared a state of emergency in Nigeria leaving the nation in comatose.

The echoes of these pit falls and creaky conditions are so resounding even to the ears of a deaf man and eloquent enough to the tongue of the dumb. This bad condition has attracted several attentions towards seeking a solution to bad governance in Nigeria. Achebe attributes the problem of Nigeria to bad leadership¹ while some others variously refer to the problem as corruption, divine punishment, mutual blame game between the leaders and the subjects, past leaders, unplanned amalgamation, religious differences, ethnicism / tribalism, e.t.c.

Fortunate enough is that every Nigerian is vexed with the present forlorn state of the nation and desires a way out of this mess. Unfortunately, the quest for solution so far can be compared to hitting the nail on the side leaving the head or painting an unplastered wall. It is therefore the interest of this paper to go beyond mere sentimentalism, rather to propose a fundamental factor to the solution of these Nigerian problems.

The paper locates the solution to the present forlornness of the nation

¹. Chinua Achebe, *The Problem with Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1958), 1

ingood conscience. The findings of this paper show that there is a fundamental lack in the use of conscience and this condition is a portentous catalyst for bad governance. Here, conscience is seen as the judgment of action and responsibility. Hence, a good use of conscience will lead to good governance manifest in rule of law, transparency, accountability, good citizenship, national peace, security and development in Nigeria. Undeniably, an integration of individual and national conscience is a sure and an auspicious means of mitigating or eradicating the plunders bad governance in Nigeria, thereby repositioning the nation to a deserved glorious state.

Understanding Good Conscience

Conscience is a subjective norm.² Etymologically conscience is derived from two Latin words “*con*” and “*Scientia*” which means “with” and “knowledge” respectively³ while “*conscience*” means “knowledge with” (ourselves)⁴ or “privity of knowledge” or “with-knowledge” (ourselves). The English translation as conscience implies internal awareness of a moral standard concerning the quality of one's motives, as well as a consciousness of our own actions⁵ or inner feelings.⁶ The type of knowledge referred here is reflexive or “inner light.”⁷ Thus conscience is

². Charles Broad, *Conscience and conscientious action* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 115–130.

³. W.C., Spohn, *Conscience, Readings in Moral Theology* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2004), 130

⁴. Antonio Rosmini, *Conscience* (London: Courier International Ltd., 1989), 8.

⁵. William Little, H. Fowler, J. Coulson, C. T. Onions, *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary On Historical Principles*. 3rd ed. Vol 1. (Oxford: Clarendon Pres. 1992), 402–403

⁶. Joseph Omoregbe, *Epistemology*. (Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 1998), 1.

⁷. Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: The Early Quakers in Britain 1646–1666* (Pennsylvania: State University Press, 2000), 221

the most secret core and sanctuary of man”⁸ that reminds him his moral obligation.⁹ Thomas Aquinas regarded *conscience* as the application of moral knowledge to a particular case.¹⁰ It is for him “Synderesis” which is the innate remnant or awareness of absolute good.¹¹ Hence for him, conscience is the “natural power of judgment” of one's action.¹² Hence William Wallace observes that:

conscience is an act of judgment; it is the knowledge that accompanies an act and notifies the agent of its rightness or wrongness. Because of this accompanying role, conscience is referred to as the subjective norm of morality, since it provides a personal evaluation of the goodness or badness of each individual action.¹³

Conscience is of different kinds. Thus, conscience can be classified into two main categories:

- (i) Conscience in relation to objective morality, and
- (ii) Conscience in relation to judgment of action.

Conscience in Relation to Objective Morality implies considering conscience in view of its conformity or none conformity with objective moral order¹⁴ in which case conscience can be either true/correct or false/erroneous, certain or doubtful depending on its degree of conformity or non-conformity with objective moral order. Conscience is true or correct when “it judges as good what is really good and as evil

⁸. Austin Flannery. ed. *'The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World', Gaudium et Spes*, (7th Dec, 1965), Vol.1, No. 16, (Dublin: Dominican Publishers, 1988), 916

⁹. Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, vol.1 (Dublin: Very Good Life, 1979), 158.

¹⁰. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, q. 79, a. 13.

¹¹. Paul. J. Glenn, *A Tour of The Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas* (India: Tan Books and Publishers, 1978), 66.

¹². Thomas. Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, Ia, q. 79, a. 13.,

¹³. William Wallace, *The Element of Philosophy*. (New York: Alba House Publishers, 1979), 169.

¹⁴. Mary Aloysius Adimonye, *My Conscience, My Guiding Light* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2002), 75.

what is really evil” and considers allowable that which is allowable.¹⁵ Erroneous conscience is a direct opposite of correct conscience. The judgment of conscience here does not conform with objective moral order. Hence conscience judges as good what is really evil, or as evil what is actually good. Erroneous conscience includes the following;

*Error of ignorance:*¹⁶ The ignorance can either be vincible or invincible. Ignorance involved in the error is vincible if the error can be overcome and judgment corrected and invincible if the error cannot be corrected by the moral agent.

Scrupulous Conscience: This means consciousness of moral evil even where none exists. Often hesitant and doubt-ridden, uncertain, easily swayed and finds it extremely difficult to come to a moral decision. He engages in ceaseless self-examination, and fears that “he has offended God or is about to do so”.¹⁷

Perplexed Conscience: When confronted with two alternative precepts in this form of erroneous conscience, one fears he will sin if he complies with either of them and leaving the other. Here, the person remains in a state of indecisiveness especially if he thinks that whatever alternative action he chooses is evil or wrong. A typical example of a perplexed conscience is a nurse who considers himself/herself equally bound to take care of his/her patient and to assist on Sunday worship.

Lax or easy Conscience: This form of erroneous conscience, for trivial reasons, deems allowable, that which is not allowable or trivializes grave

¹⁵ Milton A. Gonsalves, *Fagothey's Right and Reason; Ethics in Theory and Practice* (Ohio; Merrill Pub. Co., 1989), 54.

¹⁶ Heribert Jone, *Moral Theology*, tr. U. Adelman, (Ireland: Mercier press Limited, 1962), 7.

¹⁷ Gonsalves, *Fagothey's Right and Reason; Ethics in Theory and Practice*, 175

faults as mere trifles and, in most cases, offers flimsy reasons for committing grave faults. The principal causes of lax conscience include; sensual life, parental upbringing by excessively tolerable parents who do not care of whatever offence their children commit and are ready to defend them and make them happy even when they commit grave and blamable offences.

Considering conscience in relation to the judgment of action, conscience can be grouped into three, namely: antecedent, concomitant and consequent conscience.

Antecedent conscience: Conscience is said to be antecedent “if the judgment of the morality of an action and the obligation to perform or omit it, is passed before the action is translated into reality.”¹⁸ Here conscience commands, exhorts, permits or forbids.

Concomitant Conscience: This involves a double play of action and judgement at the same time.

Consequent Conscience: After one must have finished acting, his conscience testifies that he has acted morally or immorally. Thus, a consequent conscience is “the peace or disquiet of mind following the act.”¹⁹ If the action is good, the conscience gives peace and joy to the soul; but if it is a bad action, the conscience makes one ill at ease and embitters the soul, so that it torments the person until he/she repents of the evil done. It is accompanied by the sentiment of tranquility or remorse. Cicero used the metaphor *remorsus* from which the English word remorse is derived. This is translated as a bite, to describe the

^{18.} Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, 174.

^{19.} Martin Harrison, *The Everyday Catholic* (Oxford: Black Friars Publication, 1947), 125.

feeling aroused by a troubled conscience. No wonder, he asserts: “the gods punish wrong doing... by remorse of conscience.”²⁰ Hence the consequent conscience approves, excuses, reproves or accuses.

Conscience is not just a moral faculty that judges human actions but compels/commands one to his moral obligation.²¹ Hence conscience is binding on moral agents. Since conscience is the dictate of reason, it obliges the will and binds not by hypothetical demand but absolutely.²² Thus conscience is absolutely binding and ought to be obeyed without reference to the agents' apparent interest.²³ The judgment of conscience should always be obeyed.²⁴ In other words, “conscience whether true or erroneous binds.” Aquinas asserts in his *Quodlibetum*, as quoted by J. Omoregbe, that:

Every conscience, whether right or wrong, whether it concerns things evil in themselves or things morally wrong, whether it concerns things evil in themselves or things morally indifferent, obliges us to act in such a way that he who acts against his conscience sins.²⁵

A certain conscience must always be obeyed when it commands or forbids and must be followed when it permits.²⁶ Though erroneous conscience binds, one who follows an erroneous conscience is not exempt from evil. Judgment here disagrees with the objective norm of

^{20.} Paul Mackendrick, *The Philosophical Books of Cicero*. (London: Gerald Duckworth and Company Ltd, 1989), 71.

^{21.} Robert J. Smith, *Conscience and Catholicism*. (New York: University Press of America, 1998), 13.

^{22.} Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy vol.II* (London: Continuum Publishers, 2003), 408.

^{23.} Henry Sidwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 9.

^{24.} Battista Mondin, “St. Thomas Aquinas' Philosophy” in *Commentary on the Sentences* (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publications, 1975), 32.

^{25.} Joseph Omoregbe, *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy, vol. I* (Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Ltd, 1991), 153.

^{26.} Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 79, a. 3.

morality since the judgment of conscience is an intellectual judgment which is either vincible or invincible. The ignorance involved in the error is vincible if the error can be overcome and judgment corrected. That is to say one is culpable of one's actions. Here, ignorance is itself voluntary. When ignorance is itself voluntary in anyway, it does not render an action involuntary. Hence, invincible ignorance destroys the voluntariness of an act and its turpitude while vincible ignorance diminishes the voluntariness of an act and its sinfulness.

Regarding doubtful conscience, in a practical doubt about the lawfulness of an action, one ought not to act. One ought to remove the state of doubt by searching for the truth. The reason is that by acting on doubtful conscience, one exposes oneself to the danger of injustice and error in judgment. For example, the safer line of action for a driver who doubts whether he may still drink another glass of wine is to abstain from another glass.

This research studies conscience from both individual and national/objective perspective. This implies a consideration of conscience as both a subjective norm of action and conscience in relation to objective morality and judgement. Hence, this research invites Nigerian leaders and citizens to a mutual agreement of aligning our subjective moral norm with objective societal norms to ensure good citizenship, obedience to societal laws and good governance.

Understanding Bad Governance in Nigeria

According to the World Bank assessment, the absence of good

governance is sole cause of African's underdevelopment.²⁷ Bad Governance is the inability of a public institution to manage public affairs and public resources. It is the failure of a government to meet the needs of society while making full use of all resources at their disposal. Hence, bad governance is characterized by insecurity, corruption, crime, lack of freedom,²⁸ poor government intervention, etc. In contradistinction to bad governance, good governance can be said to mean the following;

predictable, open and enlightened policy making; a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos; an executive arm of government accountable for its actions; and a strong civil society participating in public affairs; and all behaving under the rule of law. It's characterized by participation, consensus orientation, rule of law, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, security, equity and inclusiveness.²⁹

In an attempt to describe the state of governance in Nigeria, Oluwasanmi bemoaned the consciencelessness of the leaders manifest in their disregard for common good but selfish carting and looting of public fund. Hence politicians are characteristically known for;

accumulation of illegal wealth by stealing from the people commonwealth discourages hard and patriotic labour by others and put resources needed for community or national development into private hands where it is often just stashed away in foreign banks or lavished senselessly and

^{27.} Mohammed Sambo Dasuki, "Challenges of Governance in the Era of Insurgency" *Mr. Mohammed Dasuki Sambo, the National Security Adviser to the Nigerian Presidency, read this speech at the just concluded Nigeria Security Summit, at Harvard University, Cambridge, in the State of Massachusetts, USA.* <http://saharareporters.com/2014/08/10/challenges-governance-era-insurgency-mohammed-sambo-dasuki> accessed on 2/10/18

^{28.} North, D. and R. P. T. Thomas (1996) "Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History" Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

^{29.} World Bank, "Governance: The World Bank's Experience". (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1994), 21.

unproductively.³⁰

Nigerian democracy has been truncated by several military coups which has impacted negatively in matters of governance. The return to democracy in 1999 was a sigh of relief in Nigeria. Little did we know that this sigh would be turned to sorrowful sighs in a short while. The expectations were high for the rebuilding of governance, institutions, health sector, technology, infrastructure, election transparency, justice and order, human rights, socio-economic development and national security in Nigeria. Unfortunately, these expectations were dashed as regional and national imbalances in access to healthcare, job opportunities, education, housing, and justice are now more challenging than never, thereby heightening the feelings of personal and national insecurity.

The Role of Good Conscience in Mitigating Bad Governance in Nigeria

It is undebatable that governance is about the rule of law and good conscience is an undeniable agent or catalyst to good governance. More so, Nigerian laws cover all areas of national and individual existence in Nigeria towards arresting social unrest and maintaining equanimity among the citizenry. Nigeria has wonderful and strong laws towards checkmating bad governance. These laws are capable of stabilizing our governance, security, politics, economy and total welfare of Nigerian citizens. Besides the 1999 constitution as amended, different regimes have promulgated strong laws to control bad governance, insurgency and corruption in Nigeria. The list includes the following: the “Corrupt Practices Decree” of 1975 promulgated by the regime of Murtala / Obasanjo; War against Indiscipline by Buhari / Idiagbo regime; Code of

³⁰. Joseph Oluwasanmi, “Nigeria, Which Way Forward?” (Akure: MAOTEX Ventures, 2007), 32.

Conduct Bureau of 1990; Advance Fee Fraud & Other Related Offences Decree of 1995 by the Abacha regime which was later re-enacted as the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Related Offences Act, 2006 by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo administration; The Money Laundering Act, 2004; The Economic & Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act, 2004; The Procurement Act, 2007; The Nigerian Extractive Industrial Transparency Initiative (NEIT); The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC); The Technical Unit on Governance & Anti-Corruption Reforms (TUGAR); The Economic & Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); Budget monitoring and price intelligence unit (BMPIU) which later transformed into Bureau for Public Procurement; Presidential Initiative for the North-East (PINE) and its “Emergency Assistance and Economic Stabilization (EA-ES) program” and Terrorism Prevention (Amendment) Act 2013.

In spite of these social and legal structures, bad governance still threatens our country Nigeria. Most unfortunate is that the contemporary Nigerian society is bedeviled by a myriad of challenges that threaten its social, political and economic wellbeing. Thus, we seemingly have refused to struggle to climb the ladder of rule of law and social order rather we sink into the easy and quicksand of immorality, collapse of governance, impunity and criminality. This is characterized by a steady and systematic decline in the social fabrics of the society such as politics without morality, economic corruption, tribalism, religious fanaticism, social maladies, and individual ethical disorientation. One big question that boggles the mind is, 'if these strategies have been put in place, why is bad governance and its attendant challenges unabated and unmitigated in Nigeria'?

The most appropriate answer to this question is found in the lack of good conscience and its use as a guide towards good governance in Nigeria.

The use of good conscience severs as a catalyst strong enough to maintain sanity, security and good governance in Nigeria. Good conscience elicits subjective compliance to objective morality, sensitivity to responsibility and adequate consideration of common good. This is most important in Nigeria where governance is characterized by impunity, godfatherism and lawlessness. It is very ridiculous that the rule of law is disregarded in as much as one is not caught or one has a high powered political connection. This is fondly referred to as the eleventh commandment; 'thou shall not be caught'. One is never caught in as much as one has political connection or political god father. Unfortunately, not being caught in an offence justifies an action. This is the core to the call of good conscience.

The thesis here therefore is an assertion that obedience to law and governance ought to have the binding force of good and certain conscience. Bad governance is on the increase because some individuals have developed lax conscience and other forms of erroneous conscience while caring less about the effects of this menace in the society. In relation to objective morality; true and good conscience ought to be a positive correspondence between the individual conscience and national norms, values and moral order. Conscience is true or correct when “it judges as good what is really good and as evil what is really evil” and considers allowable that which is allowable.³¹ Little wonder, Kant defined conscience as the practical reasonholding the human being's duty before him for his acquittal or condemnation in every case that comes under a law”.³² Conscience is popularly described as “an inner voice” or

^{31.} Milton Gonsalves, *Fagothey's Right and Reason; Ethics in Theory and Practice*, (Ohio; Merrill Pub. Co., 1989), 54.

^{32.} Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1791), 400

as the “voice of God”³³ that tells us what to do or avoid and compels us to act accordingly.

In the traditional sense, conscience could be said to be the intellect's practical judgment about an individual act as good and to be done, or as evil and to be avoided.³⁴ It is conscience that informs one subjectively about what is good and evil and makes him see his objective and societal moral obligation and social responsibilities.

Conclusion

The level of development of a country sometimes does not depend solely on the abundance of available human and material resources. The Nigerian State is a victim of high-level of bad governance culminating in insurgency, corruption, political instability, etc. Consequently, national development is retarded while the political gladiators constantly manipulate the people and the political process to advance their own selfish agenda, the society remains pauperized and the people wallow in abject poverty. Little wonder according to Abubakar, insurgency and corruption are the cancerous epidemic which hamper development and achievement of orderly society and encouraging bad governance.³⁵

Hence, this is a wakeup call on all and sundry towards uprooting the menace of bad governance in Nigeria through the instrumentality of good conscience. There is a dire need to reorient the entire populace on conscience and morality. Parents as well as their children all need to have a new focus towards the rule of conscience. Religious groups, school

^{33.} Gonsalves. *Fagothey's Right and Reason; Ethics in Theory and Practice*, 56.

^{34.} Gonsalves, *Fagothey's Right and Reason; Ethics in Theory and Practice*, 57.

^{35.} Adul Kashima, “Bad Leadership, Corruption, Major Troubles Bedeviling Nigeria” – Islamic scholar <https://theeagleonline.com.ng/bad-leadership-corruption-major-troubles-bedeviling-nigeria-islamic-scholar/> Dec 12, 2014

system, institutions, must not only inculcate discipline in the students and teachers through verbal counseling, a course on conscience must be built into the curriculum for maximum impact. Hence, it is only when the human person begins to act in this form even in the absence of policing authorities that a better society will emerge with good governance and its dividends achieved. Hence, a good use of conscience leads to good governance manifest in rule of law, transparency, accountability, good citizenship, national peace, security and development in Nigeria. Obviously, the use of good conscience is a sure and an auspicious means of mitigating the effects and eradicating bad governance in Nigeria.

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