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CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY AS A RELEVANT TOOL TO SOLVING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
A closer look at the myriad of economic problems confronting Nigeria had at recent time tempted some to believe that the problem remains insurmountable. It is therefore the purpose of this work to present contextual theology as a relevant tool to solving economic problems in Nigeria. Being an historical research historical method, it was utilised for the study. The findings however revealed that economic depression in Nigeria is an evil wind that blows nobody any good. Consequently, various attempts had been made by all segments of the society to alleviate the problems. In the last three years for instance, in an attempt to tackle illicit financial transactions, The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) directed all banks to stop accepting foreign currency cash deposits from customers both within and outside Nigeria's shores, without proper documentations. Having discovered that corruption is the bane of economic development in Nigeria, In January 2010, the Nigerian communication commission (NCC) ordered all GSM operators to register all sim cards subscribers as part of measures to deal with rising security problems associated with cyber crimes through the use of mobile telecommunication .The findings further reviewed that contextual theology provides a patterned and familiar way of overcoming economic crises

Keywords: Contextual Theology, Economic Problems, Corruption, Crises, Nigeria.

Introduction

It is obvious that Nigeria is currently witnessing a great economic crisis. The economic depression in post-independent Nigeria is not only worrisome, but remains an evil wind that blows nobody any good. This, as a matter of fact, has necessitated all segments of the society to try and put in place criteria for survival or recovery as the case may be. There had been various attempts in the past to alleviate the persistent economic problems ravaging the nation, for example, in April, 1982, the defunct civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, introduced the price stabilization Act which conferred on the president, the power to take necessary steps to revamp the country's economy. General Ibrahim Babangida, after the failure of Inter-national Monetary Fund (IMF) loan, also introduced a 15-month National Emergency Recovery Fund (NERF), which was then a mandatory levy upon all categories of workers both in the public and private sectors. Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was also introduced in 1986. As if all these measures were not enough, there was an introduction of a social campaign known as "War Against Indiscipline," (WAI) by Buhari regime in 1984. Oputa panel was established by Obasanjo, the purpose of this panel was to probe those that had recklessly spent and wasted public funds. Independent Corrupt Practices and Related

Offences Commission (ICPC) Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), National Economic, Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS),State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS) were currently established by the present regime to reduce, control and correct the economic challenges facing the nation(Akanbi: 2001).It is of course highly discouraging and disappointing to see that the crippling effect of reckless spending and wastage of public funds, are yet to be ameliorated. Some innocent Nigerians have had to

become victims of the offences of some faceless individuals, either by way of retrenchment or detention (Emmanuel: 2004).Without any iota of doubt, many Nigerians are suffering in the midst of plenty, the masses grope under a situation of scarcity of resources, and inability to harness the nation's God-given resources and to stabilize prices become a problem. Constant increase in the prices of petroleum products, high rates of inflation and fluctuation in prices generally appear to be the order of the day. The market situation reveals that there is an acute economic recession (Adeboye, 2005). From the foregoing, it could be seen clearly that the nation has failed to tackle its economic problems through its different measures adopted. This paper therefore intends to present theology as a panacea for the nation's economic problems.

Economic Problems in Nigeria

It is an undisputable fact that Nigeria's economy looks promising than any country in Africa in terms of resources and opportunities required for growth and sustainable development but unfortunately wealth mismanagement, corruption, and lack of accountability and transparency by previous administrations have been the main reasons for the poor economic performance. Despite the country's relative oil wealth, Nigeria's basic indicators place it among the twenty poorest countries in the world (EFCC: 2004). Also the newly released 2017corruption perception index by Transparency international also confirmed the level of corruption in Nigeria. According to this index, Nigeria was number 148 among the most corrupt countries in the world (*Sun News* *www.nigeriabar.com*)

The rise of these crimes in Nigeria began in the 80s and have, since then assumed an alarming rate to the extent that Nigeria for the past one and half decade had been adjudged as a criminal nation by a section of the international community (EFCC. 2004). Economic problems are those that emanate from people's desperate bid to earn wealth illegally thereby violating existing

legislation governing the economic activities of the government and its administration and includes any form of fraud, narcotic drug trafficking, money laundering, embezzlement, bribery, looting and any form of corrupt malpractices, illegal arms deal, smuggling, human trafficking and child labour, illegal oil bunkering, and illegal mining, tax evasion, foreign exchange malpractices including, counterfeiting of currency, theft of intellectual property and piracy, open market abuse, dumping of toxic wastes and prohibited goods to mention but a few. (Akanbi: 2004). In 2017, there were 5 corruption cases that put Buhari's government in a bad light.

These include:

❖ Employment Scandals in Central Bank Of Nigeria (CBN) and Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS). The lists of new personnel for these agencies were filled with sons, daughters and relatives of major government officials. (*operapulse.ng/bi/politics*).

❖ Grass cutting scandals of ex-secretary to the Federal Government. The Government is allocating two hundred million to cut down bushes around the camp. The main culprit in this case is Babachir Lawal who was the secretary to the Federal Government as at then. Government's reluctance to sack, suspend or investigate the scam made many Nigerians to conclude that they are scared cows in the government. (*opera.pulse.ng/bi/politics*).

❖ 24 billion NNPC contract scam. The accusations was made by the minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Dr. Ibe Kachikwu in a letter to the president. Both Group Managing Director of NNPC, Maikanti Baru, and the chief of Staff with the President, Mr Abba kyari were accused in the letter. An internal dispute settlement was done between the parties involved and the scandal was not mentioned again. (*opera.pulse.ng/bi/politics*).

❖ Illegal recall and promotion of Mr Abdulrasheed Maina. Nigerians were shocked to learn that the Fugitives ex-Police pension task force boss and Civil Servant, Mr. Abdulrasheed Maina, was reinstated and subsequently promoted to the position of an acting director in the Federal Civil Service. The trio of minister of interior, Mr. Abdulrahman Dambazau, the Attorney general, Abubakar Malami, and the CSO to the President were accused of been involved in this scandal, yet, Federal Government was reluctant in punishing these people. None of these officials has been sacked, told to resign or punished for violating the civil service Act in the country (*opera.pulse.ng/bi/politics*).

❖ Privatisation of Nigerian Police Force by IGP Idris Ibrahim. Nigeria's Inspector General of Police, Mr. Ibrahim Idris, was accused by a serving senator of embezzling Police fund to the tune of ten billion naira monthly. The fund was said to be the money income from security services provided by the force to private company and citizens (operapulse.nd/bi/politics).

Reasons for Economic Problems in Nigeria

As no man is entirely free of problems, so no nation is completely free of problems. However, the following remote and immediate factors are responsible for the prevalent economic problems in Nigeria.

Remote Causes

The Effect of Military Rule: The military regime was saturated with corrupt practices and total abuse of the rule of law. Institution which otherwise should serve as corrective instruments became themselves, agents of corruption. The rule of law took the back seat and fraudsters capitalized on the situation to perpetrate their criminal activities.

The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP): The Structural Adjustment Programmes was introduced in 1986 with the view that the programme would curb the economic problems in Nigeria. At the initial stage the programmes, to some extent, solved some of the problems, but

the fraudsters later capitalized on the liberation policies of SAP to dupe the unsuspecting members of the international business community.

The Advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT):
The use of the internet and E-mails had become a major medium for fraudsters to perpetrate their crimes. Scam mails and fraudulent proposals are sent all over the world to defraud unsuspecting and greedy persons.

Immediate Causes
- ❖ Lack of policy directions on the part of government.
- ❖ Corruptions.
- ❖ Fall in crude oil prices.
- ❖ Over-reliance in crude oil.
- ❖ Lack of economic diversification.
- ❖ State of violence among the constituent units and military group,
- ❖ Greed (Ikpor:2016).

Efforts Made by Nigerian Governments to Curb Economic Problems
The Nigerian Government made several attempts in the past to ensure that economic problems were dropped in the dustbin of history but it is quite unfortunate that government's efforts were either strangled due to inadequate enabling laws and regulations or drowned for apparent lack of commitment on the part of stakeholders expected to fight the menace (Falade: 2004).

To combat crimes, the Nigerian government promulgated the under-listed laws:

a. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)
b. Money Laundering Act of 1995
c. Advance Free Fraud (otherwise known as 419) and related Offences Act of 1995
d. Banks and other Financial Institutions Act of 1991
e. Miscellaneous Offences Act of 1985

Cognizance must be given to the fact that all the above mentioned efforts made by the government became exercise in futility because fraudulent activities still thrive in the country unabated. President Obasanjo being fully aware of the failure of these attempts did not relent in his effort, he responded positively to the yearnings of Nigerians and the international communities by taking the following steps:

- •Establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission
- •Creation of the Due Process Office in the Presidency
- •Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Act of 2000
- •The establishment of the EFCC in 2002

In the last three years EFCC recovered over 26.5 billion from perpetrators. The recovery was done in collaboration with crime agency of the United Kingdom (Tiemo: 2016).

State Security Services (SSS). The nations State Security Service has partnered with the Asia operators to track down people that are involved in criminal activities.

Tracking Illicit Financial transactions: The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) directed all banks to stop accepting foreign currency cash deposits from customers both within and outside Nigeria's shores without proper documentations (Daily Sun 2015).

Compulsory registration of Subscriber Identification Module (Sim) Card: In January 2010, the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) ordered all Asia operators to register all sim cards subscribers as part of measures to deal with rising security problems associated with cyber café.

Throughout the use of mobile telecommunication
The above reforms instituted have no doubt sharpened and deepened the strategies aimed at combating economic crimes, but corruption which is a serious economic problem in Nigeria is still practised everywhere in the country. In view of this failure, without any iota of doubt, it is however apparent that no reform can eradicate or remove economic problems from Nigeria, it is only the fear of God in the hearts of the masses that can do it. This can only be possible when contextual theology is seen as the solution.

Contextual Theology
The word "theology" is a derivative of two Greek words *'theos'* (God) and *'logos'* (word and reason) (Irwin:1959). Theology can therefore be defined as a reasoned discourse about God (Maurice: 1976). There are different methods of Biblical theology, but this paper shall examine only the contextual method. Contextualization can be seen as a theological method in which message and situation are related in such a way that neither of them is obliterated. Contextual Theology can be defined as the scientific interpretation of the word of God within the context of its operation. It is scientific interpretation of the context of the Bible putting into consideration the situation surrounding the scriptural statement.

Contextualization in theological discussion means discovering the legitimate implications, of the Gospel in a given situation. This implies a proper understanding of the message of the Gospel and proper understanding of the cultural context. It demands profound understanding of translating the gospel in its relationship to the contemporary historical situation. It is a dialogue between text of the scripture and the context in which the text was given or is to be applied. It aims at interpreting the Christian truth and applying it to the real life issues, arising from the socio-cultural context within which the theologian lives (Orebiyi and Dairo, 2000).
Since no theology is authentic and universal if it does not meet the integrated needs of a particular people in a particular historical context, contextualization therefore takes seriously the relevant communication of the unchanging Gospel message into the, language and cultural thought forms of those to whom is communicated. It involves proper interpretation of the scriptures. It takes into consideration the cultural context of the biblical message, the theological or Communicator's self-understanding and the receiving community's response to the message. To this extent, contextualization has been described as "a process which involves intercultural communication of the Gospel message" (Giya: 1994).

Contextualization can be seen as a theological method in which message and situation are related in such a way that neither of them is obliterated. It is the translation of unchanging context of the Gospel of the Kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate cultures and within their particular existential situations (Idahosa: 2004).Others view it as an attempt to free the third world countries from foreign dominion and ecclesiastical oppression; a way of making Christ real to them in their own context. Unless the Gospel is relevant to our present needs its message will be meaningless.

Contextualization will therefore mean relating the message to every world view in a way that Christ ceases to be the Messiah sent to a particular race- the lost sheep of the house of Israel – but to the whole world including all races and tribes .Contextualization can therefore be best described as the process of interpreting the scripture and Christian doctrines as a whole in the context of this contemporary time, applying the whole word to the contemporary situation. Hence, it seeks for an effective intercultural hermeneutics and communication of the Christian faith.

Contextualization methods include:

Toleration Method: This occurred where people agreed to accept the continued existence of certain traditional social custom, while at the same time maintaining that these customs were "essentially incompatible with a true Christian life". This they did with the hope that such customs would die gradually. For example, the CMS missionaries in Kenya in 1907 expressed the view that baptism should not be denied to a man having more than one wife though any church member subsequently taking a second or additional wife would be subjected to church discipline (Maurice: 1976). To contextualize Gospel message, there is therefore need to "tolerate" the customs of the people.

Translation Method: This implies a process of expressing Christian ideas and concepts using the idioms of the people. The early missionaries for instance adopted vernacular which was tantamount to adopting indigenous cultural criteria for the message, a piece of radical indigenization far greater than the standard portrayal of mission as Western cultural imperialism. The problem of translation lies in the choice of words. When translating at times the appropriate word may be difficult to find (Maurice: 1976).

Assimilation Method: This happens, as observed by Idahosa (2004) when elements from a non-Christian setting have been into essentially Christian rituals. Some indigenous religious expressions were inculcated in the Dutch Reformed Church. In Shara land for example, the people allowed an indigenous form of religious expression. "Sitting or kneeling with hands together as a sign of respect during prayer in Christianity corresponds with the way the Shona ordinary citizen expresses respect in the presence of a divinity.

Christianization Method: This process involves the creation of Christian version of Traditional rites and practices. Since those practices could not be assimilated because there was no Christian parallel, the inherently non-Christian characters of such practices have to be cleansed and shaped to the use of the church. The Masasi experiment under Bishop Vincent Lucas of the UMCA is an example (Idahosa: 2004).

Acculturation Method: This method was adopted in a bid to preserve features of traditional cultures which people felt were valuable and compatible with the development of Christian spirituality. This is a more advance stage than toleration. It essentially challenges accepted notion of the civilizing mission or missions. The "*Christianizers"* work within the traditional institution so as to preserve and restore traditional tribal life (Maurice: 1976).

Incorporation Method: This entails the introduction of traditional concepts into the body of "normative" Christianity. This, according to Giya (1994) is philosophical in character; it involves a re-interpretation of Christianity to accommodate traditional ways of thinking. However, the problem with contextualization is inevitable. There is a need to formulate and articulate a biblical method based tribal or ethnic theology which would be relevant to Nigerian economic situation.

Contextual Theology: Its Relevance to Nigerian Economic Problems

It has been established from the foregoing that various economic reforms put in place by Nigerian government have not yielded the expected result simply because of the unserious and nonchalant attitudes of the stake-holders. However, cognizance must be given to the fact that the majority of those that are responsible for Nigerian economic woes are religious people. The Christian or the Muslims among them for instance, see the Bible and the Qur'an as the scriptures of certain special and unique set of people existing somewhere. This wrong view has however, made religion irrelevant.

Contextual theology as we have seen is an attempt to make Gospel messages relevant to the people. Contextual theology teaches that the scriptural messages should be seen as the messages sent to the Nigerians by God. Jesus Christ must be viewed as the Saviour of Nigerians and not the Saviour of the Israelites only. Prophet Mohammed should be viewed as a prophet sent to Nigeria and not only to the people in Arabic countries. It is on this basis that we shall examine the Nigerian economic problems and how contextual theology proffers solution to each of them. We have earlier defined economic problems as the problems that emanate from people's desperate bid to earn wealth illegally thereby violating the existing legislation governing the economic activities of the government and its administration. We shall now examine the problems one after the other.

Fraud: Fraud can take different forms. The most popular one is the Advance fee fraud (otherwise known as 419). It has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. It is practised everywhere in the country. Though Nigerians are religious, failure to incorporate and practise religious teachings has being the root cause of economic problems being witness in Nigeria. The Bible for instance says:

If a man be found stealing … then that
thief shall die, and thou shall put
evil away among you. (Deut. 24:7)

If Nigerians can view the above verse as an instruction given to them by God and not to the Israelites, it will go a long way in curbing the problem of fraud in the nation. We can see that the Bible pronounces instant judgment against the victims. This would no doubt serve as

deterrent for others. If we can therefore contextualize this biblical truth, fraud in all its ramifications would be totally curbed.

Drug Trafficking: Drug trafficking is an illegal deal prevalent in Nigerian society: Just like fraud, it had become the stock in trade of many Nigerians. The Bible also opines that, "Every unrighteousness is sin" and every sinner is under the wrath of God. If every Nigerian that has chosen this ignoble business can contextualize and view themselves to be constantly under the wrath of God, this would no doubt create a kind of fear in them and they would stop.

Money Laundering: This has also been described as an illegal business. The perpetrators in most cases illegally and secretly withdraw public fund only to be deposited in foreign banks for their selfish interest. As regard money laundering which is tantamount to stealing, the Bible says; *If a man be found stealing ….then that thief shall die; and thou shall put evil away among you"* (Deuteronomy 24:7). If Nigerians would no longer view this scriptural verse as an instruction given to the Jews but to them, the ever-present economic problems would be totally eradicated. Nigerians should not read or consider scriptural injunctions as instructions given to certain sets of unique and special race.

Bribery: Bribery involves taking money or material substance illegally from any individual before rendering assistance which would have been rendered without illegal collection. As regards bribery, the Bible says: *The congregation of hypocrites shall be desolate, fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery* (Job 15:34).

Bribery continues in Nigeria unabated because when those found guilty are handed over to the I.C.P.C. the victims still bribe themselves out. If Nigerians can adopt the above principle as stipulated in the Bible, fear would grip those intending to give or take bribe and Nigeria would, as a result enjoy absolute peace.

Corruption: Corruption is a major recurrent issue of governance in Nigeria. Corruption in Nigeria has become endemic and eaten deep into the fabric of the nation. Corruption in its totality inhibits development. Every regime brought its own form of corruption but it seems to get to its crescendo since the last decade. In the last three years For instance, eight politicians who used to be members of the PDP and other opposition parties allegedly defected to the ruling All Progressive Congress to stop the dangling axe of the EFCC and other security agencies from falling on them(*https://www.thidsaylive.com*). The eight politicians include: The senator representing Nasarawa West at the national assembly Abdulai Adamu; Aliyu wamakko; Godswill Akpabio; Orji Uzor Kalu. Others include Babachir Lawal; Rotimi Amechi; Abdulaziz Yari and Ali modu Sheriff. (*opera.pulse.ng/bi/politics*). Corruption in Nigeria had reached a crises stage and this had generated enough public revulsion and condemnation from anti-corruption crusaders.

Corruption, according to Akani (2001), can be defined as the debasement or perversion of an approved process for the purpose of gaining an advantage which in most cases is selfish and personal. It is a dishonest and putrid way of getting things, which ordinary could not have been gotten. In Akani's submission, corruption has the capacity of permeating man's psyche and if not nipped in the bud can become part of his norms. It is the deliberate and conscious

perversion of an official process to fulfill a personal advantage. It is an act of obtaining material enrichment or opportunities for oneself or for others through the use of public office or personal connection in ways other than those publicly acknowledged through the rules and procedures of office (Akani: 2001).

Just like other social and political problems the previous effects by the past administrations to curb corruption had failed.
We would not therefore hesitate to present contextual theology as one good way out.

Conclusion

Religion, from which contextual theology emanates, is a unique subject that requires a unique scholarly approach. It is always with man. It can be described as an inescapable involvement of every member of the human race in the society. Since religion promotes peaceful co-existence among people and provides psychological consolation, it is never an over-statement to say that the future of every man, community and nation anchors on religion.

Contextual theology as we have seen from the foregoing provides a patterned and familiar way of overcoming life, economic and even environmental crises. As long as Nigerians view Biblical truth as a kind of instruction given to the Jews or the Israelite, Biblical theology would be irrelevant. If the Nigerians can view Biblical truth in its right perspective it will no doubt solve economic problems which for years had remained insurmountable.

As highlighted in the paper, the Nigerians strict adherence to the scriptural truth will land the nation on safe ground. Every Nigerian should therefore contextualize. Since the fear of man has failed, let the fear of God be inculcated in every Nigerian through contextual theology. The nation would no doubt witness economic progress instead of economy depression.

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