

A religio-ethical analysis of clergy compromise in the Nigerian political system and implications for social development

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Abstract

Given how deeply religious Nigerians are, compromise among clergy has historically been fraught with ethical dilemmas. Compromise was viewed through the prism of compromising norms and disregarding integrity for the sake of riches, lust, and greed. It removes the blessing of God's calling, the reason for living, and it makes corruption possible. It is opposed to virtues like loyalty, moral rectitude, character, leadership in the spiritual realm, aptitude for instruction, and a teachable spirit. For a clergyperson, it results in a misalignment of calling and position, which over time affects the social development of the nation as religious institutions play a significant part in developing morally upright citizens. The study consequently concentrated on analysing the topic of clergy member compromise and its effects on societal development in Nigeria from a religio-ethical perspective. The descriptive approach was used in the investigation. Secondary source of data comprised books, journal articles, the Bible, and Bible lexicons. The data collected were examined utilising deontological ethical analysis. The study submits that one of the key factors hindering social growth in Nigeria has been the clergy's compromise with the country's political system. Integrity compromise is viewed as inherently wrong and should not be observed among the clergy, according to Karl Marx's deontological ethics. It is also against the deontological ethics' fundamental tenets of treating others with respect and decency as well as the rules and obligations that govern professional conduct. These have long-term effects on Nigeria's societal development.

Keywords: Clergy, Compromise, Social Development, Deontological Ethics, Nigerian Politics

Introduction

Religion is believed to be a byproduct of society and that it has power over it. Its sacredness and importance to the human environment set it apart from all other social institutions in society.¹ Thus, among other social institutions,

¹Jacob okechukwuOnwukwe, Sociological Conceptualizations of Religion and Ethics in the Development of Africa Religion, Ethics and Development (Ibadan: Hope Publications 2019), 37.



religion is revered and commands respect. It is a component of the social structures tasked with fostering morality in the community. The clergy, which is the group of all individuals appointed to perform religious responsibilities, has this responsibility. However, as evidenced in Nigerian politics, compromise among the clergy has been unethical, especially in more modern Nigerian society, undermining many of the moral ideals that religion espouses.

Bachelor accounts that it is not necessarily a bad thing to compromise. It can be a beautiful principle that aids in establishing and upholding harmony and serenity in interpersonal interactions. However, it can be eternally deadly for Christians to start abandoning biblical values to achieve peace or pursue personal gain.²In light of this, this paper views compromise as a lowering of standards and a disregard for integrity for the sake of riches, desire, and greed. It eliminates the blessing of God's calling, gives life no meaning, and makes corruption possible. It opposes qualities like loyalty, moral certitude, honesty, spiritual leadership, the capacity for teaching, and an open mind. It results in a clergy member's misalignment of calling and position, which over time affects the social development of the nation because religious institutions are crucial to the growth of morally upright citizens.

Hence, the study's objective is to analyze the problem of clergy compromise and its Implications for social development in Nigeria from a religio-ethical standpoint. The descriptive method is used in the investigation. Books, journal articles, Bibles, and Bible lexicons all constituted secondary sources. Deontological ethical analysis was used for analysis.

Ethical framework

The deontological ethics theory serves as the foundation for this investigation. Immanuel Kant was one of the most significant proponents of deontological ethics. Deontological ethics focuses on the rules and obligations that should be followed when making moral decisions. This theory places more emphasis on the intrinsic worth of certain activities than their effects. In other words, it maintains that certain behaviours are essentially right or immoral, independent of the results they lead to.³According to Freeman, Werhane, and Sonenshe in, Kant believed that morality should be grounded in human dignity and reason. He thought that the categorical imperative, which states that one should only act in ways that can be universally applied to all persons, could be used to derive ethical principles.⁴

An essential component of the philosophy is the idea of moral obligations. This view holds that people have moral commitments that they must perform no matter what the repercussions. The significance of moral reasoning and the

²Doug Batchelor, "Compromise, Conformity and Courage," accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.amazingfacts.org/news-and-features/inside-report/magazine/id/10782/t/compromise--conformity-and-courage>

³R. Freeman, Patricia Werhane and Scott Sonenshein, "A Note on Deontology," SSRN Electronic Journal(2008): 1-2.

⁴Freeman, Werhane and Sonenshein, "A Note on Deontology," 1-2.

application of reason in ethical decision-making are also emphasized.⁵This implies that people should make moral judgments based on reason and logic rather than feeling or preconceived notions.

The idea of moral absolutes is a key component of deontological ethics. According to deontologists, some behaviours are always morally wrong, no matter the situation or the results. For instance, regardless of the causes or effects, it is universally accepted that crimes like murder, lying, and theft are always bad.⁶

Deontological ethics offers a clear and consistent framework for moral judgments, which is one of its advantages. It offers a foundation for moral decision-making that is unaffected by individual interests or emotions by highlighting the significance of moral obligations and principles. Furthermore, deontological ethics also offers a foundation for ethical decision-making that is independent of the specific circumstances or context of the situation by emphasizing the inherent value of specific actions. Meanwhile, Deontological ethics is not without flaws. Critics contend that it fails to take into consideration the complexities and subtleties of real-world situations and that its tight commitment to norms and principles can result in moral rigidity and moral absolutism. Deontological ethics may also be criticized for its focus on the autonomy and dignity of the individual, which may downplay the significance of social and cultural considerations in ethical decision-making.

Nonetheless, based on the principles of deontological ethics, this study claims that it is the church's job and obligation to uphold morals. More importantly, based on this theory, this study avers that clergy members should not transgress categorical imperatives, guiding principles, or norms.

The biblical principle of integrity without compromise

The Bible is an advocate of unwavering honesty. The moral and ethical foundation of the Bible is based on the idea of integrity without compromise, which is strongly related to the concepts of righteousness and uprightness. According to the biblical perspective, integrity is acting honourably even when no one is looking. It goes beyond simply acting honourably when others are there.

The Hebrew word for integrity is used 137 times in the Old Testament in various forms, and they convey the idea of something whole, without fault, just, honest, perfect, and tranquil, so on; as a result, they refer to a quality or attitude that indicates authenticity and dependability.⁷The Bible reveals that God appreciates sincerity, honesty, and truthfulness. Proverbs 10:9 accounts, "Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out." Similarly, it is stated in Psalm 15:2-3 that the one who will dwell in God's

⁵Abderrahmane Benlahcene et al., "A Narrative Review Of Ethics Theories: Teleological and Deontological Ethics,"IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) 23, no. 7, Ver. 6 (July. 2018):35.DOI: 10.9790/0837-2307063138

⁶Benlahcene et al., "A Narrative Review Of Ethics Theories: Teleological and Deontological Ethics," 35

⁷Payne J. Barton, "אִשְׁרָיִם" Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 973-974

tabernacle is “he whose walk is blameless (integrity) and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbour no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman.” These verses illustrate that God values those who live with integrity and honesty, and He rewards them for their faithfulness.

Tchamba comments that there is a thematic contrast between the wise and righteous person and the wicked fool as seen in the eleventh chapter of Proverbs. He makes clear that righteous and wise individuals exhibit virtues that promote their own well-being and the welfare of their society. These virtues include an accurate weight that pleases God, wisdom that springs from humility, integrity that leads the righteous, life that comes from unwavering righteousness, and faultless ways that please God while wicked individuals will perish for their wickedness.⁸

Similarly, Jesus Christ, who is the best example of honesty, led an uncompromised life. He never shied away from speaking the truth, even when it was controversial or challenging to do so. He also stuck with His goal despite opposition and persecution. Jesus declares in John 8:29, “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” This verse demonstrates that Jesus led a moral life and made an effort to please God in everything He did. His behaviour was dictated by obligation.

Truthfulness, honesty, and transparency are commitments that must be made in order to live a life of integrity. It entails being dependable in both big and small ways, and doing what is right even though it may be uncomfortable or expensive. A commitment to integrity without compromise entails sticking up for what is right despite hindrance or retribution. When given the option of surrendering his integrity or risking his life by disobeying the king’s order, Daniel decided to remain true to God, even knowing it might result in death. For Okonlawon, as a result of Daniel’ integrity, his acts as a political leader and holder of public office in Babylon were significant, scripturally grounded, and God-inclined. In both his private and public lives, Daniel followed his Christian principles and conducted himself accordingly.⁹

According to Proverbs 11:3, the bible also mentions grave repercussions that affect both the individual and those around them. It also makes clear that it encourages corruption (Proverbs 25:26; also see 1 Samuel 2:12, 16–17). James, therefore, exhorts Christians to keep their word and to uphold their commitments and duties (James 5:12). According to Copeland, Christians should serve as the ultimate symbol of moral excellence. Integrity should be the guiding principle for clergy. Maxey adds that a clergyman needs to maintain a transparent record of his fidelity. He should never consent to actions that would go against his conscience or engage in any sort of moral transgression. His sole motivation should be to

⁸Augustin Tchamba, “God and Integrity: a Case Study of Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Norman L. Geisler”

Dissertations. 153 (2012), 46.

⁹Samuel O. Okanlawon, “Biblical Concept of Integrity as a Resource for Christian Political Leaders and Public Office Holders in Nigeria,” *Nigerian Journal of Christian Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021): 60.

advance morals and spiritual goals in whatever activity.¹⁰The Seventh Day Adventist Ministers Handbook corroborates that clerics (ministers) must display a variety of traits, including faithfulness, moral purity, integrity, spiritual leadership, intelligence with common sense, relational skills, teaching ability, and a teachable spirit as those called by Christ.¹¹These emphasise the value of clerics who are unwavering in their honesty.

Compromise among clergies in Nigeria

The issue of clergy compromise has consistently come up, particularly in the Nigerian political system. Pokol contends that the Nigerian church and its leaders (Clergies) have a responsibility to uphold social justice and integrity by holding every repressive organization accountable; however, they have fallen short of this duty.¹²According to Ezewudo and Peters, one of the ways that the Church has negatively impacted national politics is through the manipulation of some church officials (clergy) by influential people or politicians who identify as Christians to further their agendas. Greed has permeated the religious landscape to the point where some religious leaders now favouring politicians to sate their appetite for money and other material rewards.¹³Religious leaders and political leaders should be more concerned with how to ensure the common good of the people in Nigeria; however, as Sahara Reporters claims, religious authorities in Nigeria and their political partners appear to have neglected their duties in the process of fostering national development and this union seems to hamper the progress of societal development in Nigeria.¹⁴

More so, Pokol citing Ojo, accounts that Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements developed within the milieu of State failures and instead of holding the state accountable to social justice, church leaders have found the state failure a fertile ground for advertising their selfish agenda.¹⁵ These assertions are made in light of clergy-related occurrences in Nigerian politics. According to Ezewudo and Peters, Rev. Fr. Mbaka humiliated and expelled Peter Obi from his church's harvest thanksgiving because he belonged to the opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). He adds that Rev. Mbaka allegedly publicly endorsed Hope Uzodimma of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and urged President Buhari to give money to his ministry so that he would not lose the 2019 elections.¹⁶Adetunmbi claims that Pastor Wale Olanju's¹⁷ 'divinely'

¹⁰Parker Maxey, *A Guide to Ministerial Ethics And Etiquette* (Lagos: West Africa Theological Seminary Publications, 2017), 350- 351.

¹¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook* (U.S.A: the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Publication, 2009), 17.

¹²Benjamin JunnangPokol, "Nigerian Church Leaders and the Burden of Upholding Integrity: A Search for Mind Decolonisation," *Nigerian Journal of Christian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2021): 38.<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/njcs/article/view/220819/208364>

¹³Ugochukwu O. Ezewudo and Prince E. Peters, "The Role of the Church in the Quest for Political Restructuring in Nigeria," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 1 (2022): 2. A7254. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7254>

¹⁴Sahara Reporters, "Religion And Political Reforms In Nigeria," (2010), accessed May 6, 2023, <https://saharareporters.com/2010/06/06/religion-and-political-reforms-nigeria>

¹⁵Pokol, "Nigerian Church Leaders and the Burden of Upholding Integrity: A Search for Mind Decolonisation," 40.

¹⁶Ezewudo and Peters, "The role of the Church In the quest for political Restructuring in Nigeria," 2.

inspired prediction that Muhammadu Buhari would lose to Atiku Abubakar in the 2019 presidential election was a watered-down prediction based on political scheming. This is because, following his prophecy, Pastor Olaganju went on to attack President Buhari in favour of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP), claiming that only an adult son of the devil would support Buhari.¹⁸

These events tend to project Karl Marx's conception of religion, which contends that religion serves the elite's oppression of the masses¹⁹ rather than its intended role as a force for morality in society. Therefore, it is in the best interest of clergy and church officials to restore the Church's allegedly lost dignity.

Religio-ethical analysis of clergy's compromise in Nigerian polity

Deontological ethics, which suggests thinking and acting based on duty and principles that are always right, is used to analyze the issue of clergy compromise as it is perceived in the Nigerian polity. Therefore, as has been noted, compromise among clergy undermines the deontological ethical stance, which lays a great focus on the values and obligations that govern professional action. According to this viewpoint, it is unethical to violate such values. However, it has been made clear that certain clergy members engage in behaviours that go against what their calling calls for. Some clergy have ignored their professional ethics and commitments in favour of self-gratification through financial gain and lobbying by important dignitaries. This appears to impair religious institutions' moral authority and the congregations' respect for and trust in their clergy.

The congregation and society at large tend to receive less attention when clergy members compromise for personal wealth, lust, and greed. This can be viewed as a breach of the principle of treating others with respect and dignity following deontological ethics. According to deontological ethics, clergy members should put the needs of their flocks before their own. Therefore, it is possible to view as ethically wrong any form of self-serving action, such as theft, misusing church finances, or compromise of integrity in politics.

More specifically, the idea of moral absoluteness is a key component of deontological ethics. It implies that some behaviours are ethically wrong regardless of the situation or the results. By extension, this notion makes it morally and intrinsically wrong for clergy to compromise their integrity, as is seen in Nigerian politics. In simple terms, clerics who uphold integrity as opposed to compromising put their congregants' welfare first, uphold a high standard of moral conduct, and take responsibility for their conduct. It also implies the creation of unambiguous ethical standards and training to ensure

¹⁷He is the presiding Bishop of Divine Seed of God Chapel Ministries, Ibadan.

¹⁸Moses Adebolu Adetunmbi, "The Integrity of Religion in Nigerian Politics, 1999 – 2019," *Nigerian Journal of Christian Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021): 198.

<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/njcs/article/view/220868/208408>

¹⁹G. Aderibigbe, 'Definition of Religion,' in *Religion. Study and Practice*, Eds. G. Aderibigbe and Deji Aiyegboyin, (Ijebu Ode: Alamsek Press, 1997), 6.

that clergy members are prepared to carry out their duties ethically and responsibly.

Implications for social development in Nigeria

One of Nigeria's challenges has been social development. According to Aruna and Ngwu, social development is the process of deliberate social change intended to advance the welfare of the entire populace.²⁰To create a flourishing society, people's living situations must change. It might not be out of place to claim that religion has contributed to the difficulty of social progress in Nigeria given the recent occurrences concerning the compromise of clergy members for financial fulfillment and gain. It is assumed that one important goal of religion is to produce individuals with high moral standards to foster the growth of a flourishing society. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the clergy to instill in people good moral values like self-control, godliness, kindness, honesty, faithfulness, righteousness, hard work, trustworthiness, love, and integrity from an early age so that social development can continue to strive and prosper.

However, the rate of corruption has risen as a result of professional compromise. Remarkably, some clergy overlook the wrongdoings of well-known, affluent, and powerful persons as long as their negligence benefits them in some way. Others engage in such activities to raise money for religious programs, but in actuality, they do so to satisfy their own desires. Long-term, this encourages powerful and rich Nigerian politicians to continue engaging in immoral behaviour that endangers the socioeconomic development of the nation.

Furthermore, although religious institutions ought to serve as a platform for fostering relationships and friendships based on love and harmony that foster social cohesion in society, some clergy members sow the seeds of strife in Nigerian society due to their compromised moral character. By doing this, some encourage ethnic and cultural prejudice, which hinders Nigeria's efforts to develop a strong social fabric. Messages from some clergy have also been impacted by a compromise. Some people do not exercise much caution when listening to sermons and teachings that present erroneous images of life. Such messages lead people to feel that everything in life revolves around wealth and making money, and when their expectations are raised and then smashed against a stone, they become dissatisfied, give in to temptation, and make compromises that have an impact on the social development of society.

Conclusion

Nigeria's struggle with social development has been greatly impacted by clergy members' compromise in the country's political system. Integrity compromise is viewed as fundamentally wrong and should not be observed among the clergy, according to Karl Marx's deontological ethics. Deontological ethics' tenets of treating others with respect and decency as well as the rules and

²⁰ E.O Aruna and A.N Ngwu, "Social Development in Nigeria: A Case Analysis," *International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability*, 6, no. 1 (April 2018): 1-9.

obligations that govern professional conduct are all violated when clergy members compromise their integrity for personal and financial gain. Long-term, social development in Nigeria is impacted by these.

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