JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618 | Vol. 2, Issue 2, No. 1 / June 2024
https://www.jopd.com.ng

ETHICS IN THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL PLEDGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN LEADERS

Gabriel Salifu Ph.D
gabrielsalifu99@gmail.com
08039608519, 08076228468
Lecturer in the Department of Christian Religious Studies, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria.

Daniel Olasunkanmi Oladapo
dansunkanmi@gmail.com
07032523715 & 08184830087
Lecturer in Redeemed Christian Bible College, Ogun State

Abstract
The lackadaisical attitude of Nigerians on issues affecting the development of the nation has become a source of concern to all and sundry and various efforts made by successive administrations to change their orientation at different levels of government in the country have not yielded to any success. This has accounted to series of problems facing the country since independence. Several scholarly works have been done from different perspectives on issues affecting national life and how a change of attitude can be ensued among Nigerians. An attempt was made in this research to discuss ethics in the National Pledge and its implications for Nigerian leaders. The research made use of socio -ethical and historical approaches and descriptive method. Literatures, articles from archival journals were employed and utilized as sources of information. It is argued that if both the leaders and the followers internalize the content of the pledge not only by reciting it but acting the contents therein, Nigeria will be a better place for all to live and the development of the nation will not be a mirage.

Keywords: Ethical values, National pledge, Implications, Leadership role, Nigeria.

Introduction

The nations graph of development is experiencing a downward trend due to ethical problems factored by loss of values by many citizens. Many citizens are so negative that vices attract praises and not virtues. Much importance focuses on materialism. Disregarding ethical values, many Nigerians, aiming at wealth and influence by any means, are involved in all kind of crimes and atrocities. It is eating deep into Nigerian society, so much, so that corruption, embezzlement, bribery, theft, yahoo yahoo, kidnapping, rituals and abortion and other vices are becoming the order of the day and characterized the image of the nation. Some people have accused Nigeria of not having any standard ethical values (Wadak, 2007). Hence, this work is premised on ethics in the National Pledge and its implications for Nigerians in leadership role.

A Nexus Between the National Pledge and Leadership Role

It is pertinent at this juncture to explain the connection between the national pledge and leadership role. The pledge of a nation is a binding promise or agreement made by people to their nation. It is meant to act as an overall direction of which the country chooses to take and how it plans to get there. On the other hands, leadership role describes the moral responsibility, expected of someone in authority at various levels. In the world, everybody

wants to be in the place of authority, (Ango, 2005). If you go to the post office, the clerk selling stamps, because that is their place of control, wants to exercise authority over the buyer of stamps. Policemen are supposed to help us when we are in trouble. But anytime you go to them with a problem, they want to put you in a corner and exercise authority over you.

Apart from trying to exercise authority, people want to use their position to their advantage. All the problems facing the nation stemming from political leaders are as a result of people wanting to use their power to their personal advantage. And we find out that it has become an all-pervasive culture, so much so that people will want to pull rank on some other persons, or to gain some advantage for themselves at the detriment or the moral responsibility embedded in the National pledge.

For there to be an unprecedented development in the country, those at the corridors of power and even the followers should know that they should do everything humanly possible to develop the country. Those at the corridors of power should also have it at the back of their minds that it is their moral responsibility to provide basic amenities for the people and this can be done when the values in the National pledge are internalized and acted. It is through this that the citizens will see the sincerity in their political leaders (Oke, 2013). If they do otherwise, then the citizens will negate work ethics structured in the natural agenda as a mere political statement with no serious impact on the society.

National Pledge and its Ethical Implications

The National pledge of any country is an identity of such nation. It is a binding promise or agreement we make between ourselves and our nation. It is meant to act as a direction in which the country chooses to go and how it plans to get there. It also traces her history and it is the pillar upon which any nation stands. The Nigerian National pledge was composed by Prof. (Mrs) Felicia Adebola Adedoyin in 1976; sixteen years after Nigeria gained her independence from the British government. The composition of the pledge, though by an individual, is a reflection of the fact that Nigerians have decided to come together to channel their energies for the development of their fatherland. Those who witnessed the attainment of independence and those who lived in the early 70s knew the importance of the pledge to them. The reverse is however the case now. This is because Nigerians do not take the pledge very seriously any longer. The reason for this lackadaisical attitude is not far-fetched. Our leaders since independence have only been engaging in lip service without complying to what is being recited in the national pledge Ayantayo, 1999)

Every successive government makes promises of turning stone into bread through the provision of basic amenities of life. But, on getting to the office, they engage in all sorts of illegalities to amass wealth for themselves, forgetting their promises and leaving those who voted them into power to wallow in abject poverty. Morality, which should be the hallmark of both political leaders and their followers, has been removed from politics and what we have now are the treasury looters and bunch of thieves in government. Followers also have their share of the problem in the country. This is because the followers of today are the leaders of tomorrow like an adage in Igala says "*enwu ki defu amote ogba tako ote mu onwu y achene kada fu*". This means "a drunkard says what has been on his mind before he got drunk." This non-challant attitude affect both the leaders and the followers.

This is why a critical appraisal of the National Pledge is necessary to see where our political leaders and even the followers have missed their tracks. The line of the pledge goes thus:

"I pledge to Nigeria my country,
To be faithful, loyal and honest
To serve Nigeria with all my strength
To defend our unity; And uphold her honour
and glory; so help me God."

A Consideration of Ethical Virtues in the National Pledg

Beginning with the first line, "I pledge to Nigeria my country".

A pledge is a solemn promise made by Nigerians to their fatherland. A pledge is like a covenant which must be faithfully kept. But, have not broken the covenant in various ways as a result of greed, self-centeredness, nepotism, favouritism, robbing Peter-to-Pay-Paul syndrome, which has eaten deep into the bone marrows of Nigerians? And the biggest monster ravaging the entire nation now is corruption, which has become endemic in our system despite the various anti-corruption agencies set up by the government to tackle the menace (Olabode, 2011) Today, many Nigerians have become dishonest and a large section the society not only continues to tolerate illegalities and corrupt practices but also venerate them. A quick mention must be made here of a politician in the country who was sent to prison for embezzling money meant for public use, but on his return from prison, had a big thanksgiving service organized in honour of his meritorious service of looting his fatherland. What a shame: What corruption has taught Nigerians now is that it does not pay to be honest, hardworking and law abiding.

Virtues of Faithfulness and Loyalty

The second line of the pledge reads: "To be faithful, loyal and honest".

Honesty is a virtue which everybody must imbibe. The wisdom behind the common saying that honesty is the best policy is not immediately evident today. Omoregbe says what is immediately evident to the superficial observer is that honesty does not pay, that it is dishonesty that pays. The word "Honesty" as found in the National pledge is not being practiced anymore. what we find around now is the way those at the corridors of power use dishonest ways to perpetrate evil, which is contrary to the pledge made to their nation. Faithfulness as contained in the pledge is forgotten by Nigerians, most especially those in government (Omoregbe, 2004). The Biblical injunction as found in Deuteronomy 7:9 says:

> *Know therefore that the Lord thy God, the faithful God which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him…*

However, it is also strongly emphasized in Surah 2:42; 61:2-3 where the holy Qu'ran metaphorically "refers to honesty as a missile to be hurled at falsehood, thus, knocking out its brain." Muslims are enjoined to be honest in words and deeds". Man according to Islam is created a moral being and for this reason, he is expected to compliment his faith with good deeds (95:5-7). An honest person will be rewarded abundantly by combining his honesty with good deeds 29:15, 30:45.

Apart from the virtue of honesty emphasized in the two holy books, the virtue of honesty is not left out in the oral tradition of the African people. For instance, in the Igala adage, the value of honesty and truthfulness are emphasized in this manner:

N' kogecha, n' cho kpa kpa
N' ko ge cha' n' cho kpa kpa
Ene ogecha 'ami ibegwu ato bi'

Be honest and be truthful
Be honest and be truthful
He who is truthful is the one
Supported by the divinities (Salifu, 2014)

The Phrase, "To be faithful, loyal and honest", from the ethical point of view, presupposes moral responsibility on the part of all public office holders and all Nigerians. Ayantayo posits that morality demands that public office holders be honest and faithful in order to discharge their official duties as expected of them. Honesty is a moral value which must be practiced in speech, thoughts and deeds.

What we see today in the political arena in Nigeria is that honesty is no longer the best policy (Ayantayo, 2004). Adherence to these virtues by all will contribute meaningfully to all-round development agenda. That is, if both the leaders and the citizens make honesty and loyalty to their fatherland their watchwords, the government will know that it is her duty to protect and provide basic amenities for the people, and the citizens will also know that it is their duty to obey those in government and pay their taxes as at when due without being forced to do so.

Virtue of Honesty

The get-rich-quick syndrome has beclouded our leaders' sense of reason and from treading the path of honour by being loyal to their people. It will be very difficult for a nation to develop when those at the helm of affairs are not honest and patriotic. Bible, specifically emphasis in Proverbs 14:34 that "Righteousness exalts a nation". This presupposes that for any nation to be great indeed, the leaders, from the president to the ward councilor, must make faithfulness, honesty and loyalty their everyday affairs.

Another ethical issue arising from the content of the National Pledge, which goes along with the moral value, is service to humanity. The Oxford Advanced Leaner's Dictionary defines service as a system that provides something that the public needs, whether organized by the government or a private company. From this definition, it is obvious that the provision of basic necessities of life is the responsibility of those at the corridors of power. The basic amenities that are expected by the people form a responsible and responsive government are pipe-borne water, electricity. good roads, hospitals etc.

The public office holders and the politicians must know that they are servants to the people and should treat everybody without fear or favour, affection or ill-will, as suggested by the content of the pledge (Ayantayo, 1999).

The next phrase is *"To serve Nigeria with all my strength".*

This is also being abused today in Nigeria. This is because dedication, which should be the hallmark of those in authorities, is being thrown into the dust-bin and replaced with undisguised greed, dishonesty, corruption and the mentality that the government work does not require much dedication *(Aki kpa ola wa tefu she odan).*

Omoregbe (2004), also observes that the situation has degenerated to such an extent that anybody who finds himself in a position to enrich himself through fraudulent another corrupt practices but refuses to do so is regarded as a fool and scorned by his friends and relations. Instead of using their strength to fight for the unity and progress of the nation, such strength is used to siphon money meant for the generality of the people to their foreign private accounts. We have stories of political office holders who used their positions to loot the public treasury. From Sunday Afolabi with the National Identity Card scam to Tafa Balogun, the erstwhile Inspector General of Police with the Police Fund saga, Dimeji Bankolo, Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello, Lawal Farouk, Oduahgate with her two bullet proof BMW cars the list continues (Oke, 2013). Many Nigerians now believe that there is nothing wrong with stealing government money or money belonging to a company an institution or a large organization if one is lucky to find oneself in a position to do it without being caught (Omoregbe, 2004). Even when caught, our legal system is not helping the matter. Many of those caught are either asked to pay certain ridiculous amount of money as fine or serve a year or six months behind bars depending on the gravity of the office committed. NO ailing economy can be successfully revived and restored to health in an atmosphere already taken over by corruption. The strength to serve the country should now be used to wage serious war against corruption so that the country can be a better place for us all to live in.

Also, the phrase, "*To defend her unity and uphold her honour and glory*"

Virtue of Selfless Service

The unity of any nation is very important and it cannot be negotiated for anything. The unity of Nigeria is being threatened in recent times by the activities of kidnappers and Boko Haram (Familusi etal 2013), who have constituted themselves as clogs in the wheel of progress of the country. Boko Haram (a group that claims that Western education is forbidden) a group that finds it very easy to take lives. They abduct and even kill victims who are held hostage in their custody without necessary compliance from their relatives. The latest group now is yahoo yahoo boys and girls spread across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. Statistics has shown that the users of the internet are more of youths, University graduates, as well as university and secondary school dropouts. Administrators learnt that 43% of the dropouts are staying up all night on the internet (Wallace, 1999). When internet technology came into Nigeria in the late 1990s, banking sectors became the first beneficiaries and were upgraded immediately and the youths and some graduates, university and secondary school dropouts started adapting themselves to the website by constantly visiting cyber café and bombarding various sites. In the process, yahoo yahoo business (online fraud) began, which is the most thriving job for the teeming youths today (Alamu, 2021) and (Salifu 2023).

A very sad trend about this issue is the fact that most of the militant groups, kidnappers, religious fanatics and yahoo boys and girls in various parts of the country are being supported wo have pledged to protect the unity and the integrity of their country. The various promises made by those in government have not translated into the protection of lives and properties. Apart from the activities of the above mentioned groups, every day in the news, we hear about ethnic clashes of all sorts all around the country. We might be united by boarder, but are we truly united by bonds of friendship and cordial relationship? Do we see people from other ethnic groups as out brothers and sisters whose lives must be protected? Issues of national interest are often considered based on ethnic and religious sentiments. The responsibility of all Nigerians is to defend the country against any external aggression. The interest has, however, dwindled in recent times as a result of the way those at the corridors of power have turned the common wealth into their own personal property, which may be squandered at will. The developed countries of the world today attained greatness, partly as a result of patriotism shown by their leaders and citizens. But, unfortunately, the level of patriotism in Nigeria is low and without mincing words, this has contributed to the development of the country negatively. Nothing is too big for an individual to do for his country in order to make her great. And this is why reference will be made to the statement credited to the former president of United States of America, John F. Kennedy when he said:

> *"Think of what you can do for your country and not what your country can do for you"*

The security agents too have their own share of the problems in this unpatriotic attitude. They are to maintain law and order in the society, but their activities have shown that they are unpatriotic and more active and eager to commit criminal activities than any other agents of government. The politicians who are the people to protect the lives of the citizens should be held responsible for the lackadaisical attitude of Nigerians towards the recitation of the National pledge. The people have lost hope in the government of today. Though leadership failure is not an excuse, the task of building a viable nation is a joint responsibility of both the leaders and the followers alike. This is why we draw from an admonition in 1 Timothy 2:2, stating that; *"I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications and giving of thanks be made for all men for kings and for all that are in authority; that they may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty".*

Also in Hebrew 13;17

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourself; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief".

The issue of obedience is not limited to the Bible and this is why Qu'ran also admonishes the faithful to respect, honour and obey those that rule over us. That is why chapter 4:60 says,

"O ye who believe, obey God and obey the prophet and obey those in authority from among you".

The passage above admonishes the citizens to honour and obey those in government. This suggests that it is the moral duty of every citizen to obey those in authority. But, for those in government to be obeyed, they must be above board in their dealings. This is the only way the citizens of the country can have a change of attitude towards their fatherland by being patriotic.

The last stanza of the pledge is "so help me God"

From what we have above, It is clear that both the leaders and the followers have missed the import of the content of the last line of the pledge. There is a big difference between saying a thing and acting same. When, in Psalms 45:7, the Bible states that *"You (God) loves righteousness and hates wickedness".* Also, Proverbs 14:34 says *"Righteousness exalts a nation and sin is a reproach".* All those at the helms of affairs their followers and the citizens at large must know that they cannot bribe God. You don't call on God to help when your primary concern is not to build a virile nation but to loot the treasury. This is why the Bible, in Proverbs 28:9 says that: *"He that turns from hearing the law, their prayer is an abomination before him."*

The civil religion is regarded as the national religion of any country. While the President of such a country is considered to be the religious leader, the citizens are the adherents. Therefore, it behooves the leader to rule with the fear of God, which will automatically have positive effects on the lives of the citizenry. As said earlier, the popular slogan among Nigerians today is to serve Nigeria is not by force. This shows clearly that loyalty, dedication, honesty and patriotism and love which should be virtues to be imbibed by all, have now been relegated to the background and what is popular and being celebrated by most Nigerians now are corruption, favoritism, get-rich-quick syndrome, kidnapping, ritual killing, yahoo yahoo phenomenon, etc. It is well known fact that most of the developed countries of the world today attained greatness partly as a result of the patriotism shown by their citizens. Unfortunately, the level of patriotism of Nigerians is low and this has without mincing words, contributed to the development of the country negatively.

Odudele (2012) is of the opinion that a good government is meant to carry out effective and efficient management of the resources of the nation in the best way to better the lots of the people. It is in line with this that reference will also be made to the statement credited to the former Head of state, Late General Murtala Muhammed whose remark was quoted by Olupona that:

> "God Almighty has endowed Nigeria with the human and natural resources to make it a great nation. It is we the people who have to make the country great by the conduct we exhibit in our private and public affairs (Olupona, 1991)"

The word conduct as used in the quotation above means a person's behaviour which has to do with the righteous on wrongness of such behaviour. If Nigeria is truly going to be great, the people must be ready to change their attitude and the best way to start this is in the total overhauling of the lackadaisical attitude of most Nigerians when the National Pledge is being recited. This is why we give credit to the decision of the National Assembly that the second stanza of the National Pledge should be recited too. This will go a long way in re-orienting the public on the importance of the pledge to national development.

Having said this, it is then the responsibility of the church to build a just and equitable society which according to Okunoye (2012), is a society that cares for all its citizens, especially for those that are weak and marginalized; a democratic society that respects our National Pledge, constitution, rule of law that guards against misuse of power and the one that fosters the role of civil society.

This is why Daino (209), opines that leadership is nothing if not linked to collective purpose; and that the effectiveness of leaders must be judged, not by press clippings, but by actual social change, measured by intent and satisfaction of human needs and expectations. Therefore, for the people to have faith in the government, good governance on their part is germane for sustainable development, such ingredients include poverty eradicating equity, improved quality of life, transparency; public participation and accountability (Dairo, 2009).

And most importantly, for there to be a change of attitude by Nigerians, those at the corridors of power must confront corruption with all impunities that it deserves. This is because corruption in Nigeria today has become an accepted value system and the worship of materialism has taken the central stage in our national life. Nigeria generally must also have a change of attitude towards their country since we have no other country. We should try to imbibe the spirit of honesty, sincerity, dedication and selfless service and join hands with the government of the day in order for the national development agenda of government to be a monumental success.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the attitude of Nigerians towards the recitation of the National pledge. It is observed that the problem is caused by both the government and the citizens. This is predicate on the fact that they give series of campaign promises that are not fulfilled on getting to power, which has given the citizens the impression that the country is not worth dying for. It was discovered that if Nigerians quit rendering lip service and begin to imbibe the ethics of the national pledge, then the nation is heading for national development. It will as well re-orientate the people on the need for them to have a new sense of direction since we do not have any other country that we can call ours.

Recommendations

This paper is predicated on examination of the unpatriotic, disloyal, and dishonesty attitudes of most of Nigerians towards the National pledge. Without any doubt, it is obvious that most Nigerians are not honest, loyal, faithful and not ready to sacrifice anything for their country and this has resulted in the snail speed of progress. This lackadaisical attitude is mostly caused by successive government in the country. This is why recommendations will be made in this paper to help the stakeholders know what is required of them to make the country a great nation indeed.

Firstly, Moral education at all levels by using the pledge should be practiced as fairness in one's personal dealings with others and equitable distribution of social amenities and services. Ethical values such as the following should be deliberately taught in our primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

i. Honesty: Demonstrated by truthfulness, fair play, sincerity and rejection of the giving of bribes and of corruption.
ii. Regard and concern for others: This manifest in true neighborliness, humanness, and sportsmanship.
iii. Justice: This should be practiced as fairness in one's personal dealings with others and equitable distribution of social amenities and services.
iv. Discipline: This is constituted by self-control, moderation, morality and respect for legitimate authority.
v. Right attitude to work: This include punctuality, devotion to duty, cooperation, and respect for the dignity of labour.
vi. Courage: This includes physical, moral and spiritual determination to do the right despite all odds.
vii. National consciousness: Involves patriotism, belonging, service to the nation, loyalty, unity and communalism.

Secondly, Religious leaders should take the bull by the horn to educate their members on the need to develop right attitude about the country.

Thirdly, schools at various levels should also make the recitation of the National pledge compulsory. This should not be through mere singing but by learning the letters of the pledge and committing them to memory until it becomes part and parcel of their sub-consciousness.

Fourthly, exposing corrupt people and making them to face the consequences of their action. This will make the citizens see the government as being serious in their fight against corruption and also build a sense of confidence in the members of the public.

Fifthly, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should take up the responsibility on the importance of the National pledge in nation building. This could be done through the mass media. If this is done, it will inculcate the spirit of patriotism in the youths and all Nigerians at large.

Sixthly, Government at all levels should establish transparency mechanism that offers public servants and the society means to report acts of corruption and ensure the independent control of systems and procedures.

Seventhly, Civic Education should be re-introduced in schools, most especially at the Nursery and Primary school levels. If this is done, it will help in no small measure to inculcate the spirit of patriotism embedded the National Pledge to the minds of the young ones.

References

Ango, S.P. (2005) *Divine Principles for Politics.* Remi-Thomas Pres Ilorin.

Ayantayo, J.K (1999). *Ethical issues in the oath of office in Nigeria Constitution*, In ORITA: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, xxiv/1-2. 128-138. June – December.

Ayantayo, J.K (2004). Fundamentals of Religious Ethics, Ibadan, Samprints and Graphics co.

Dairo, A.O. (2009). An Assessment of the church Leadership in Nigeria in the Light of Leadership Qualification in Abogunrin (ed) I Timothy 3:1-7. *Biblical Studies and Leadership in Africa.* A publication of Nigeria Association of Biblical Studies (NABS) Ibadan, M. Alofe NIg. Enterprises.

Familusi, O.O. and Oke, O.P. (2013). The Revival of Religious Moral Values as a Panacea for Insecurity in Nigeria in J.K. Ayantayo et. al (eds). Religious and Security Issues in Nigeria, Proceedings of 2013 Biennial International Religious Studies Conference, Ibadan, John Archers Publishers Limited Dugbe, Ibadan.

Kennedy, J.F. (1961). An Inaugural statement in Washington D.C. as the 35th President of United states of America.

Odudele, R. (2012). Biblical view of Governance: A veritable tool for Nation Building in Nigeria. In Ayantayo et.al (eds) *Religion and Governance in Nigeria*, Ibadan Samprints and Graphics Co.

Oke, O.P. (2013). Ethics in the Nigerian National Pledge and its implications for the Transformational Agenda, In *ORITA: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies,* XLV/1&2. 76-90 June-December.

Okunoye, J.O. (2012). *The Role of the Church Towards Achieving Good Governance in Nigeria in Achieving Good Governance in Nigeria,* Ibadan Samprints and Graphics Co.

Olabode, B.O. (2011). Corruption and Religious Values: An Exploration into the manipulation of Religious as agent of corruption. In A.B Sunday (ed), *Corruption, Democracy and good Governance in Nigeria,* Saki, Real Success Consult.

Olupona, J.K. et.al (1991). *Religion and Society in Nigeria: Historical and Sociological Perspectives,* Ibadan, Spectrum Books Limited.

Omoregbe, J.I. (2004). *Ethics: A systematic and Historical Study.* Lagos. Joja Educational research and publishers Limited.

Salifu, G. (2014). "Religious Ethical Issues in Cybercrime among Youths in Oro Community, Kwara State." MA dissertation submitted to the Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Salifu, G. (2023) Youths and yahoo yahoo Phenomenon in Nigeria: A Moral Response. *Journal of Political Discourse,* Vol 1, No. 3. 200-215 September. https://www.jopd.com.ng