

Socio-Religious and Political Implications of Righteousness in Amos 5:24 on Nigerian Developmental Milieu

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Abstract

A good number of academic works done in the book of Amos focused basically on social injustice with little emphasis on righteousness. Despite the attempts by scholars, the Government and well-meaning Nigerians to salvage the insalubrious situation, the escalation of corruption and social vices continually hindered the political and economic development of Nigeria. In the meantime, the acclaimed giant of Africa is plagued with a violation of good governance and moral values. However, this paper employed a historical-critical method to examine the theology of righteousness in Amos 5:24 and its socio-religious import in the Nigerian developmental milieu to restore justice and righteousness. The findings show that there is a dire need for God's approved righteousness that produces equity, fairness, economic growth and political stability. It is worthy to note that religious and ethnic crises are hybrids of unrighteousness and moral dissipation from the family, the religious organizations, the educational environment, political parties and society at large. There seems to be spiritual blindness of the religious adherents, and upper and ruling classes in Nigeria which is evident in the unjust exploitation of the poor. The fact is this if about 95% of Nigerians claim to be religious, who then are the perpetrators of evil in the nation? This signals the unidentified missing link in the socio-religious context of Nigeria – hence, the thrust of this article. The present study, therefore, recommends serious tracking of God's approved righteousness, responsibility and accountability in governance. Self-righteousness and hypocritical worship that substitute for the demand of the covenant should be eschewed to attract the mercy of God for national development. Religious adherents and leaders should uphold the integrity and emulate Prophet Amos in providing eternal witnessing of God's opposition to economic, political and social abnormality. To ensure that justice rolls like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream as stated in Amos 5:24, all Nigerians should maintain self-discipline, and moral values and advocate righteousness in all agents of socialization.

Keywords: Socio-Religious, Implications, Righteousness, Development, Milieu

Introduction

The present study examines the socio-religious and political situation of Nigeria in the light of justice and righteousness in Amos 5:24. Existing studies on the book of Amos have focused more on social justice with little attention paid to its socio-religious context of ideal righteousness concerning the Nigerian contemporary situation.

Kunhiyop (2008) observes that unrighteousness is the major obstruction to the development of the Nigerian economy, despite the tremendous inherent human and material resources, oppression and exploitation of the poor and perversion of justice are unrighteous characteristics in the country at the moment. Gender inequality, marginalization and indiscriminate distribution of federal power and resources among others are unrighteousness and injustice that have bedevilled Nigeria. The present situation in Nigeria is like what was obtained in the nation of Israel and Judah during the time of Amos. How can this social injustice be ameliorated? Should the prophecy of Amos be relevant to the socio-political and religious situation of Nigeria? The present study is yet an attempt at proffering a possible redress. Righteousness is synonymous with justice, equity, fairness, uprightness, integrity and holiness. This concept is one of the communicable attributes of God which deals with the conformity in conduct or practice to the principle of right or positive law; fulfilment of an obligation, rectitude and honesty.

According to Ewetan & Urhie (2014), Righteousness is the state of being right with God whereas injustice is unfairness and violation of the rights of another person. It is related to corruption which is described as efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means – private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit. This definition includes such behaviour as bribery which is the use of a reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust; nepotism implies the bestowal of patronage because of ascribed relationship rather than merit; and misappropriation being the illegal appropriation of public resources for private uses. Corrupt practices are so common and entrenched in Nigeria's public service to an extent that most citizens have accepted it as a way of life. It has contributed immensely to the poverty and misery of a large segment of the Nigerian population. The country requires justice and righteousness for economic development and political stability to be achieved.

Textual Consideration of Amos 5:24

וַיָּגֵל כַּמַּיִם מִשְׁפָּט וצְדָקָה כַּנָּחַל אֵיתָן:

“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (RSV).

Exegetical Analysis of the Texts in the light of Socio-Religious Context of Amos 5:24

Baker (2008) presents Amos 5:24 in New International Version, thus: “But let justice roll on like rivers and righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5: 24). Justice and righteousness are intertwined. Justice involves bringing people into a right relationship with Yahweh and each other, and these right relationships produce right behaviour known as צְדָקָה (righteousness) in Hebrew.

Fortune (2015) avers that God's law provides very specific guidance concerning just behaviour. It requires witnesses to be honest and impartial (Exodus 23:1-3, 6-8). It requires special consideration for widows, orphans, and other vulnerable people (Deuteronomy 24:17). While Israel is always tempted to define its service to God by the performance of cultic duties (ritual sacrifice, Sabbath observance, etc.), the prophets keep reminding them that justice is a basic duty of the faith community (Micah 6:8). McCain (2009) notes that the prophet outlined the sins in question here—the things that constitute their injustice and unrighteousness.

- They “hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks blamelessly” (Amos 5:10). In other words, they hate authorities who prevent them from using unscrupulous means to achieve their evil ends.
- They “trample on the poor, and take taxes from him of wheat” (Amos 5:11).
- They “afflict the just (and) take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the courts” (Amos 5:12).
- Yahweh's concern, then, has little to do with the quality of their offerings or their music. It has to do with their character—with their hearts. They can do nothing to please Yahweh until they resolve this “heart” issue.

“But let justice roll on like rivers, and מִשְׁפָּט (righteousness) like a mighty stream” (Amos 24). Finley (2003) explains that those who sit alongside a swift-running river or a mountain stream soon find themselves filled with wonder at the prodigality of the flow. The water just keeps on flowing. It matters not whether they observe it at noontime or dusk or dawn—there is similitude and an unending quality to its flow. It would be impossible to calculate how much water has passed that spot, and equally impossible to calculate how much more will pass by it in the future. It is almost as if they are getting a glimpse of infinity. It is that same infinite quality that Yahweh is demanding to see concerning Israel's justice and מִשְׁפָּט (righteousness).

Edward (1998) explains that Amos related righteousness and justice in Amos 5:24 as a literary style of Hebrew poetry known as synonymous parallelism and of great figurative significance is the connection with waters as a simile. The Hebrew word *myim*; the plural form of *myim* means water. In Brown, Driver, and Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, the uses of *myim*; are well classified especially the figurative references, as follows: a symbol of distress, thus: “when thou pass through the *myim*; (waters)” (Isaiah 43:2). Ogba (2005) agrees that this means that one is with God will never be harmed by the difficulties and challenges of life. In other words, forces in the passing through of waters never come over the strength of God's sided people. And “like the breach of *mayim*”, recorded in 2 Sam 5:20 shows the power of God who rules on everything; which is overwhelming through his power. Then “a tempest of mighty waters overflowing” as in Isaiah 28:2 means fear that is the anger of the Lord when he made a punishment, no one will be able to stand firmly before him like a destroying storm. Moreover, in Joshua (7:5), transistorizes, Job (11:16); of refreshment, Isaiah (32:2); of peace, Psalm (23:2); of legitimate pleasures, blood (Psalm 79:3), Proverb (5:15); of illegitimate pleasures, “Stolen waters are sweet” (Proverb 9:17), wrath (Hosea 5:10), justice (Amos 5:24), groaning (Job 3:24). Such these are the symbolism of waters in the bible and there may be more beyond my findings. Therefore, we will mainly deal with the symbolism of waters as justice which will be helpful in the understanding of the concept of *mayim* (waters), we will also emphasize the concept of waters in the Ancient Near East.

As already shown, the contemporary society of Amos was characterized by the heartlessness of wealthy elites who ignore the plight of the poor, the lack of justice for the righteous, and the emptiness of religious rituals apart from true faith. Brueggemann (1983) observes that the people of Northern Israel went to Bethel and Gilgal where they worship idols and multiplied their sins by doing evil things (Amos 4:4). Then they believed that they could recover their sins against God by sacrificing burnt offerings with grains and animals (Amos 5:21-22). But the Lord would not accept any of the offerings. Fortune (2015) opines that

Prophet Amos's heart message is the well-being of people and the purity of religious festivals. Besides, he also emphasized that Yahweh is the God of moral righteousness, Yahweh made all people. Then Yahweh elected Israel and then redeemed Israel so that He would be known throughout the world (Amos 3:1-2). Election by Yahweh means that those elected are responsible to live according to the purposes clearly outlined to them in the law: bear his justice and righteousness (5:24). Only if they transformed their sterile worship into fellow human concerns with justice and righteousness, would be true worship and acceptable sacrificial offerings to him.

Socio-political Context of Israel in the time of Amos

According to Ogba (2005), the state of the nations of Israel and Judah during the time of Prophet Amos after the death of King Solomon, about the year 930 B.C., the kingdom of Israel was divided into two. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the south remained loyal to the new king, Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. The other tribes in the north revolted under the leadership of Jeroboam, a man who had been one of Solomon's lieutenants and made him their king. From that time, the southern kingdom was called Judah, while the northern kingdom kept the name Israel. They were both small kingdoms, rather like some of the African chiefdoms or Indian princedoms in more recent times. Their people were mostly farmers and traders, and they had none of the power of modern "nations". Ogba (2004) narrates that Israel and Judah were very closely related. The people of both tribes spoke the same language, honoured the same ancestors, and followed many of the customs. People could travel easily from one kingdom to the other. But there was often trouble and bitterness between them. One reason for this was that they had different forms of worship. For the people of Judah their capital city of Jerusalem was the chief place of worship; the temple there was their "holy place". But for the people of Israel, the altars at Bethel and Gilgal were more important, where idols had been set up by the rebel king Jeroboam. The two nations were also separated by political differences. Israel looked to the north and tried to find allies among the nations there. Judah looked to the south and hoped that Egypt would be her friend.

The capital town of Israel was Samaria. During the time of Amos, many rich people were living there. According to Menezes (2003), some of these people probably gained their wealth by leasing or selling their land to working farmers. Others were merchants who bought and sold the produce of the hillside farms. But many people in Samaria were very poor. Sometimes the harvesters treated them very harshly. The king of Israel at the time of Amos was Jeroboam II. Politically, he was a strong ruler, and during his reign, the people felt secure. They could see the boundaries of their nation being extended to the north-east. But they failed to see the great danger which was coming from Assyria, further to the north-a danger which Amos saw very clearly.

Finley (2003) narrates that some of the nations, surrounding Israel and Judah were large with big armies; some were small and weak. At the time when Amos lived, the kingdom of Assyria was the

most aggressive and powerful of these nations. The Assyrians were fierce and warlike people. They had become powerful in the Ninth Century B.C. and ruled the whole stretch of land between the Mediterranean coast north of Palestine and the River Tigris at Nineveh. In 841 B.C. the king of Assyria, Shalmanester III, invaded Syria and compelled Jehu, who was then king of Israel to pay him a large sum of the tribute money. It was clear to the people of Israel that they could not fight against Assyria with any hope of success. But the Assyrians themselves had problems. Their nation covered wide areas which include many different tribes of people. During the period from 800 B.C. to 750 B.C. the tribes in the northern part of this Assyrian empire were restless and eager to rebel. The Assyrians, therefore, concentrated their armies in that area, and Israel had a period of safety. But when Tiglath-Pileser III became king of Assyria in about 745 B.C. there was no more rest for Israel. He was a great soldier and conquered many territories. He occupied Damascus in 732 B.C., and this led to the fall of Damascus in 732 B.C. That was the end of Israel as a separate kingdom. The Assyrians took large numbers of Israelites away from their land and completely broke up Israeli national life. There was a need for the rebuilding of the Israel nation.

Kunhiyop (2008) in his ethical perspective opines that the luxury of the wealthy class in Israel is indicated by the prophet as he speaks of their "couches" and "silken cushions" (Amos 3:12), of their "winter house" and "summer house," and the "houses of ivory" (ivory inlay and ornamentation), and of "the houses of hewn-stone" (Amos 3:15; 5:11). The voluptuous women were spoken of as "kine (cows) of Bashan," who insisted that their husbands provide ample wine and other luxuries for their feasts, even if the poor had to be crushed in order to provide them (Amos 4:13). Their feasts were characterized by revelry, songs, music, choice meats, and the best of wines to satiate their lusts, and by cushions and silken tapestries upon which to recline (Amos 6:1-7). These luxuries were enjoyed by the wealthy, whose eyes were closed to the afflictions and needs of the poor (Amos 6:6).

The moral condition of the nation was revealed by the prophet's shock at the cruel treatment of the poor by the rich, at the covetousness, injustice, and immorality of the people in power, and the general contempt for things holy (Amos 2:6-8). Trampling on the poor, taking exactions of wheat (Amos 5:11), afflicting the just, taking a bribe, and turning aside from the needy. Amos 5:23 stirred the indignation of the prophet and gives us insight into the morals of the day. These people were ready to "swallow up the needy" and "to do away with the poor of the land" - that is, to let them die (Amos 8:4). In political circles, there was tumult and oppression, violence and robbery (Amos 3:9-10). Iwe (1985) asserts that the people hated any judge who would reprove them or speak uprightly (Amos 5:10). Then suddenly, against this background of prosperity and oppression, a man who knew poverty appeared from Judah. For a few short months, he denounced the sins of Israel and promised judgment.

Davidson (1995) reveals that Amos was a native of Tekoa, a town about 12 miles south of Jerusalem. A farmer and herder, he had spent his life caring for sheep and harvesting the sycamore fig, the "food of the poor." He was used to hard work and was accustomed to a frugal life. He stood in sharp contrast to the "beautiful people" of Israel. Shocked by the moral, social, and religious situation in the Northern Kingdom, Amos stood at Bethel (the centre of worship established over a century before by Jeroboam I) and denounced the lifestyle of Israel. In a series of scathing sermons, he confronted the wealthy and ruling classes, exposed their sins, and pronounced in flaming anger the punishment that God was to impose. Amos' anger was but a pale reflection of God's wrath. Yet the prosperous of Israel were unmoved. To these proud and selfish men,

unconcerned about the misery of those they oppressed, Amos must have seemed some wild fanatic. He was out of touch with modern times - perhaps simply jealous that he was himself poor and not one of the favoured few! Later, Jesus would comment to His disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:24) Prosperity promotes values in deep conflict with what God Himself says is important. How hard it is to have wealth and status, and retain perspective!

Social Injustice in Amos' Time and Contemporary Nigerian Society

Dambazau (1994) compares Ancient Israel and our contemporary era especially the period of the Prophetic ministry of Amos and present society. Comparing Nigeria with Israel in the time of Amos, one would observe that Nigeria has become a place where the land, money and wealth are shared among the nobles to the detriment of the poor. The poor suffer at the hands of the rich. Oppression has become the food of the populace. Since Nigeria gained Independence in 1960, tribalism, nepotism, corruption, discrimination, rigging of elections and gross injustice has dominated the economic, political, judicial, cultural, religious and ethnic lives and minds of many Nigerians. In other words, in contemporary Nigeria, one is amazed by various forms of social injustice such as (i) socio-economic injustice, (ii) socio-political injustices, (iii) socio-religious injustice, and (iv) socio-judicial injustice. As justice was denied at the time of Amos, so it is also being denied in contemporary Nigerian society. This is evident as would be discussed.

Socio-Economic Injustice

Menezes (2003) avers that the socio-economic situation of Amos' time in Israel is very much like that of Nigeria today. Just like in Amos' time, the signs of economic prosperity in Nigeria could be seen in so many things. Nigeria is naturally blessed with a lot of mineral resources. In Amos' time, the people had winter and summer houses, houses of ivory and hewn stone houses. In Nigeria, some people have houses in almost every part of the country. While some of these houses are built with ordinary block cement, some are built with baked clay while others are made also of hewn stone. The fleet of cars being paraded in Nigeria is also a sign of this economic prosperity. The interior decoration of these houses and cars simply denotes extravagance. The economic prosperity could also be seen in the extravagant way some Nigerians eat and dress, just like in Amos' time. Amos called only the women of Samaria cows of Bashan (Amos 3:4) because of their extra size, gained through excessive eating and drinking, but here in Nigeria both men and women have this extra size, gained through corruption or ill-gotten wealth. Abogunrin (1994) observes that many Nigerians display a lot of wealth in the way they dress. They usually put on expensive clothes. The expensive pieces of jewelry and perfumes they wear speak of affluence. The pair of shoes and wristwatches cannot be left out for they are very costly too. This sign of affluence could also be seen in the way wealthy Nigerians display money during social functions such as weddings, traditional marriages, funeral ceremonies, birthday parties and so on. In the full glare of the public the wealthy spray money like water on the celebrants. Sometimes bundles of money are sprayed one after the other to the excitement of the masses. Most unfortunately, the prosperity or wealth of the Nigerian nation, which is confined to a few groups of people, has brought with it all kinds of economic hardship, social disintegration and moral decay in Nigeria. In Nigeria, money is the measure for all things because of the inestimable value attached to it; everyone itches to get it through hook or crook. During Amos' time, Amos relates how the businessmen of his time get impatient for the termination of the holy and work-free periods of the new moon and Sabbath so that they can engage in their corrupt business practices. The same situation applies to Nigeria. According to Ugwueye (2002), Nigerians who are engaged in what may be called the real business

of buying, selling and supplying goods and services for money are the real deceits. They, of course, make the shekel and the ephah small as Amos said. The cups, tins and bags used in measuring grains are below their sizes and still, the grains measured with them are sold at the same price as the ones measured with full-sized measures. The situations show that traders in Nigeria do not have the interest of the buyers at heart and therefore, they cheat the buyers in order to enrich themselves. Amos pointed out that the business of his time also sold the refuse of wheat to the people. This is equivalent to the rampant adulteration of goods in Nigeria just to make money. The rate at which adulterated drugs, fake and poor-quality products are produced in Nigeria is very pronounced and a worry to the good citizens because these have sent many to early graves. Despite these difficult situations, the Nigerian government has not been forthcoming in curbing corruption and injustice in the country.

Socio-Political Injustice

Ugwueye (2002) notes the comparison between Israel in the time of Prophet Amos and the present situation in Nigeria. Just like in Amos' time, the prosperity or wealth of the Nigerian nation, which is confined to a few groups of people in politics, has brought with it all kinds of political decay in Nigeria. The quickest way of amassing wealth in Nigeria today is to occupy a political office or position. During elections people who win are not the real winners, but the cleverest riggers. Unemployed youths are paid and used as thugs to manipulate elections. Human life is valued less than political goals just as the poor were equated with a pair of shoes in Amos' time.

In line with the thought of Achebe (1983), embezzlement of public funds by those in authority has been given the appearance of legality in Nigeria. Schools, roads, hospitals and other social facilities are poorly maintained. The poor masses bear the direct brunt for they are the ones to be hospitalized in public hospitals where there are no adequate drugs. Their children are the ones to attend public schools where the teachers are not devoted to their work because of the epileptic payment of salaries and incessant university teachers' strikes. The wealthy ones can afford to pay the high bills in private hospitals and schools. Most times their children attend schools in overseas countries. The poor parents who spend their fortunes training their children in school cannot reap the benefit of their effort because the government cannot provide jobs. It is no longer graduate unemployment, but post-graduate unemployment. Many Masters and PhD degree holders are jobless. Nigeria as a nation is rich but those in authority embezzle and mismanage the funds to the detriment of the poor masses. The prevalence of injustice in Nigeria is largely traceable to the type of leadership we have been experiencing since Independence. Many Nigerian leaders have not been able to rise above the situation they met on the ground, because they came into office without just vision or with a corrupt vision. Many past Nigerian leaders since Independence often thought there was no corruption in Nigerian politics while some others who acknowledged it, for one reason or the other failed to muster adequate courage and force to tackle it. This is the reason why Achebe (1983), earlier said that the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to challenge personal examples which are the hallmarks of true leadership. It does appear that injustice in Nigeria is part of what is handed over from one government to the other. This is why corruption seems to be institutionalized in Nigeria.

Socio-Religious Injustice

Despite all the corruption and immorality in 8th Century Israel, Amos made us know that the people punctiliously observed their religion. The same is true of Nigerians. Despite all the corruption and immorality in Nigerian society, people are pretending to be religious, observing their religious duties as a matter of life and death. This is observable in the life of many Christians and Muslims. Obiora (1998) opines that religion in Nigeria today is being used for selfish ends. He sees religion as a fast business that people are embarking on. Looking at Christianity in Nigeria, the numerous churches in Nigeria today are not set out for the pure motive of serving God but for self-aggrandizement. With close study and interaction, most Christians do not know what they believe in, whether money or God. Because they have more concern for their business than God, they always strive after the way to accumulate more wealth for themselves, forgetting the demands of their relationship with God who is the foundation of all beings. They do not even have time for studying God's word. Today, we can hardly distinguish between a Christian and a non-Christian, because of the craving for wealth and pleasure. Oko, (2020) asserts that the church which is supposed to be an agent of change is not free from this menace as transfers of ministers are done in connection with Godfather and son relationship and not on who qualifies. At times pastors' transfers are done based on ethnic sentiments.

Ugwueye (2002) observes that Nigerian Christians pay regular visits to worship centres. The regularity with which these centres are visited by Christians is alarming. Apart from this, the Christians organize religious crusades everywhere and every time in this country. There was a constant performance of rituals at the sanctuaries during Amos' time. Nigerians as well show diligently these external forms of religion without any spiritual commitment. Various sacrifices and tithes, of stolen money, are offered daily in the church. Bribes are offered before one goes on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This is sinning under the cloak of religion.

Religious feasts, which are very many in Christianity, are observed meticulously by Nigerian Christians. Offerings, especially thanksgiving offerings, by those who succeed in their improper business are regularly given in the churches. Amos was talking about the noise of songs and the melody of harps during his own time, today in Nigeria, it is the noise of the musical equipment that is heard in religious Centres. Both the offering and the music are all religious formalism and external rites unrelated to the heart's inner motives.

Socio-Judicial Injustice

Oputa (1996) reveals that rape of justice in Nigeria even by the judiciary is an open secret. The judiciary is the branch of government invested with judicial powers to interpret, construct and apply the law so as to produce justice by discovering the truth. The whole process of adjudication is thus a human attempt at the discovering truth. It is the end which ought to be reached in a case by the administration of the principles of the law involved as applied to the facts. The court should therefore be a temple of justice.

According to Oputa (1996), "It is common knowledge that the courts are infested by the virus of bribery and corruption." This has made justice in our courts a marketable commodity with the hammer falling for the highest bidder. Ugwueye (2002), rightly views that venal judges and all other people that settle disputes at all levels of society deny poor people justice, because of bribes from the rich. The rich are constantly claiming poor people's acres of land, yet the court always

rules in favour of the rich, because of bribery. Muojekwu (2004) also clearly states that it is very unfortunate that Nigerian courts have turned into war zones by greed, avarice, selfishness, and various unspeakable deeds of judges who prepare two contradictory verdicts (judgments), one for the plaintiff and the other for the defendant; these judges wait anxiously to sell the verdict to the highest bidder. Consequently, Ugwueye and Muojekwu, (2004) explain that what happens in the judicial sector in Nigeria should not surprise any right-thinking and honest Nigerian. This means that in Nigeria, the judiciary as an organ of government is no longer the hope of the common man, but rather the grave of the common man.

Equality before the law seems to be slipping gradually into a mirage. Our police cells and prisons are filled with inmates whose only crime was that they could not pay their way through the modern criminal justice system. Human rights are abused daily under obnoxious decrees. Political opponents are sometimes clamped into detention centres in the name of state security. Kukah (1989) avers that the Nigerian judiciary is indeed lousy with the corrupt institution as some alleged miscreants rot in cells and prisons in the name of awaiting trial. Justice delayed is justice denied. The biblical assertion that the love of money is the source of all evils suffices. In our world today one is constantly told that there is nothing money cannot buy. It follows therefore that money can buy justice.

The implication of Amos 5:24 on Nigerian Society

The fact that Nigeria is in dire need of justice cannot be denied. To appreciate the relevance of the prophetic ministry in contemporary Nigeria, there is a need to discuss briefly the country's socio-political situation by the implication of Amos 5:24. The fact that immorality permeates Nigerian society today cannot be doubted. According to Kukah (1989), the existence of corruption in various stages of development is well-known. Bribery, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, acts of violence, favouritism, stealing and daylight robbery, oppression and exploitation of the poor, Boko Haram insurgency, kidnapping and banditry, are prevalent in today's Nigeria. Politically, the situation is worst. Our leaders are corrupt and inept. The religious leaders too are not left out. They are not particular about spirituality but prosperity. They ignore the issue and pay no attention to the true words of God.

From the foregoing, Nigeria's socio-political situation is similar to those in which Israelite prophets functioned. Just like in ancient Israel, Nigeria is in desperate need of "Prophets" who will condemn the corruption and evil in high places. These prophets must be spirit-filled and bold. Just like the prophets are watchmen visionaries in ancient Israel, Nigeria needs men of integrity and courage, who will speak the truth not caring whose ox is gored. Like Prophets in ancient Israel, Nigeria needs men and women whose convictions would be deep-rooted and grounded so that they would be able to maintain a stern, powerful, fearless stand in denouncing and rejecting the evil in the society.

Contemporary Nigerian society requires characters whose exhortations to repentance would address the rich, the political leaders and the judges to be inspired by the deepest moral earnestness. Nabofa (1989) observed that men and women like the ancient Israel prophets will stand for justice. Who will condemn the political, economic, social, religious and moral ills of the day? To see the emergence of men and women who will operate like the ancient Israelite prophets, the message of the biblical prophets should be taken seriously. The message of the prophets should come alive in our consciousness.

The lessons from the book of Amos are relevant in contemporary Nigerian society because the high level of corruption in Nigeria is similar to that of Northern Israel and Judah in the time of Amos. The message of Amos was disapproval and chastisement of corrupt political and even religious leaders. Nigeria, at the moment, is characterized by the oppression of the poor masses; the rich are getting richer and exploiting the poor as the poor are getting poorer and only surviving at the mercy of their exploiters. Injustice and prejudice in all tiers of government to the extent that the few godly leaders compromise and pervert justice to lose their jobs. There is a common slogan among the elite or power that be “If you are aggrieved go to court”. The rule of law is bypassed and the commands are intentionally disobeyed for the fear of the people in power.

This menace has affected not only the political sector but runs down to economic, educational, religious and health sectors, to mention but a few. Bribery and corruption seem to have overtaken the judiciary system in that most Nigerians have lost confidence in taking their cases to court. Most people find it very difficult to believe the election results declared by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the just concluded Presidential and even Governorship Elections. Manipulations of figures and destruction of polling units are seen as smartness and lucrative business for some individuals while following due process is considered obsolete and tantamount to failure. The injustice in Amos' time seems to have been upgraded in Nigeria with the heightened effects of the internet and social media.

The religious leaders were supposed to be the conscience of the society and mouthpiece of God as Amos did, but have grown worse in their enclave. Apart from the false prophets who eulogize the corrupt political leaders to make their selfish gain, power tussle and denominational intolerance have eaten deep into the fabric of the religious sector. Moreover, religious conflicts, sentiments and tension among the Muslims and Christians in Nigeria have given insecurity to different garbs that have affected the economy and political system of the country. Outspoken religious leaders have been attacked for various reasons while the majority are silent for sake of their lives. This paper holds that prophets with Amos' spirit and courage are highly needed to rescue Nigeria from moral decadence and social injustice.

These kinds of irregularities made Amos envisage and prophesy against the calamity that would fall upon the nations and therefore call the leaders to righteousness and equity. Righteousness exalts a nation and sin is a reproach to any people. Righteousness attracts the blessings of God in terms of prosperity and national development. Since all authority belongs to God, leaders are positioned by God as representatives to faithfully discharge their duties for the benefit of the poor masses and nation-building; lessons should be learned by both leaders and masses in Nigeria to promote social justice and morality.

Conclusion

The authentic righteousness of any religious community is a spirituality that cries for justice, peace and holiness in all aspects of life. The central theme of God's salvation in all religions is justice. The ultimate goal of both Christianity and other faiths for societal development is righteousness and justice.

Recommendations

Christians in Nigeria must continue to engage aggressively in combating the oppressive structures and evil systems of do-or-die affair elections and rigging of elections that ruin Nigerian society. This study suggests future actions to help build a new Nigeria as follows;

Christians and our leaders at large should take a stand against death-dealing evil forces in politics, economy, social and religious life, and identify alternatives to a better life and a new Nigeria.

- ❖ Work for a religious liberation, promote a spirituality of people's struggle for justice and equality and take into account theological work as part of the people's cry against injustice.
- ❖ Engage in a dialogue on practical issues at the grassroots level and network with people's movements (workers, farmers, indigenous people, fisher folks, urban poor).
- ❖ Define the roles and rights of women and children in the context of violence, trafficking, labour, migration and ethnic conflicts and develop them as an integral part of people's struggle for liberation.
- ❖ Translate all challenges into specific calls and actions at the community and national levels.

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