

TRANSCENDENTAL PATRIOTISM: BIBLICAL ETHICAL TOOL FOR THE REVERSION OF MATERIALISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

A critical driver to the growth and development of nations has been patriotism because it touches the fundamental interests of all citizens. When ethically applied, patriotism arouses the citizen's concerns to love and to conduct themselves in ways as to uphold the political sanctity, economic development, social fulfilment and appropriate expressions of attachment to a country refusing to commit acts that are capable of truncating any democratic process. Using the historical and ethical analyses, the paper discovers that, in Nigeria, the citizens have lost their appetite and love to protect the nascent democracy and have chosen the part of materialism. A cursory ethical look at the country reveals that there is no form of modest human patriotism from the leaders to the led. This paper therefore examines and upholds a transcendental patriotism. Citizens would, therefore, be required to live by a code that guides social and political conduct with God as the Sovereign Leader thereby disallowing self-love to overshadow responsibility and duty. A conclusion was drawn having in mind a reversal of the culture of materialism based on transcendental patriotism. The paper recommends that other religions develop and apply such transcendental patriotism to run the moral message complet.

Keywords: Transcendental patriotism, Biblical ethics, Citizenship, Materialism, Nigeria

Introduction

The world-over men have an inevitable response when caprice and transitory experience govern instead of reason and true knowledge. Hence, the determination to find the outlines of the kind of community that would be in harmony with the needs and aspirations that would reflect timeless truth and that would be attainable wherever there are men of rationality and goodness. The Nigeria nation is not left out especially now that the destructive instead of the constructive and reparative attitudes of our leaders has

caused some academic reformists within us to call for a revolution that will bring about a change of attitude from both the leaders and the led. The pursuit of material culture is the dominant attitude leading to total neglect of the masses that has in turn led to wild and recalcitrant behaviours among the citizenry. The character revolution of the ethical perspective anchored on the biblical ethics is the concern of this paper. Nwabueze (1993:254) expresses it pungently thus:

An ethic of civic virtues must be linked to, or form part of, a national ideology, like constitutional democracy, a national ideology does not consist merely of a set of abstract ideas, it is rather a set of ideas characteristics of a nation, that is to say, a set of ideas shared and subscribed to by the nation, and to which its members have committed themselves.

As has been observed by Toluhi (2001:240) that, every nation desires and works towards progress, unity and the general well-being of its citizens. These ideas can hardly be achieved if the society is not guided by some measure of standard, moral principles with which the people readily identify”, that would help them to abandon the pursuit of material things and focus on spirituality. Transcendental Patriotism if well-conceived and repositioned on very sound moral substratum is one of such very fundamental ethical issues that sees justice done, rights respected, human solidarity at work, maintenance of law and order and numerous other ethical practices achieved. In very specific terms but more general is the “transcendental patriotism” which focuses on love towards God. A patriotism without the love of God is more likely to be devoid of altruism, allowing self-love to overshadow responsibility and duty. Transcendental patriotism will, therefore, breach the gap between national and democratic failures especially the changing of materialism and the achievement of Godly standards where the love of everybody will become the rule. What belongs to everybody will be given to him or her leading to justice and fair play.

Conceptual Framework

Transcendental

Etymologically speaking, the concept transcendental was used by Kant in Forward (2001) to mean that which is beyond consciousness and cognition as opposed to the immanent. For Kant therefore, “the only transcendental knowledge is that which deals both with objects and the method of their *a priori* cognition. Considered as an apperception, it is the non-empirical, initial, pure, and invariable consciousness, which determines the unity of the world of phenomena, from which it receives its forms and laws. In a very simple way, Oshitelu (2009:45) sees this as “the quality of God as a being who is beyond that is given in experience.” The idea of transcendence is more easily understood in moral rather than physical terms (Oshitelu, 2009).

Patriotism

For better understanding, words or concepts are traced from their original meaning to the diversified. Patriotism comes from Greek root *Patrios* which means “fatherland”

(Egbunu, 2009: xxi). Elsewhere Egbunu (2009) states that in the light of the contemporary resurgence of patriotism the term is laden with many nuances in its meaning. Coming from a psychological point of view, Clement in Egbunu (2009:73) sees patriotism “as in any other type of effective relationship a more complex affair than one single emotion or attitude.” Politically, patriotism can be seen to “consists of human characteristics of love and service directed towards one's country's goals and aspirations” (Dzurgba, 2000:90).

A transcendental patriotism as applied here refers to the love and desire to serve one's country beginning from the family to the district, then state to international and finally God who owns this nation (the universe). Ultimately, transcendental patriotism is the love towards God and the desire to act his laws to promote humanity and God's Kingdom. This kind of protection transcends sense perception to *a priori* substance. Nationalistic patriotism is therefore limited and not sufficient enough to compel us to love ourselves, except the godly aspect is brought to focus. It is a religious and or ethical patriotism (Forward, 2001).

Biblical ethics

Ethical words serve not only to express one's feelings but also to arouse feeling and therefore to stimulate action. Some of the ethical words give the effect of command (Dzurgba, 2000). Biblical ethical knowledge is that which can tell us what things are desired and how these desires can be most efficiently satisfied in the bible. Biblical ethics can equally be called “Ethics in Scripture” which according to Shields (2004:21) means (1) to discover what standards God has set in Scripture for human behaviour (2) to note how those standards apply to ourselves as individuals Christians and communities today. The task of knowledge in ethics, therefore, is to tell us which is “right” and which is “wrong” (Dzurgba, 2000).

Citizenship

Citizenship connotes “the situation or status of being seen as a bonafide member of a nation or state complimented by all the accompanying rights, duties and obligations” (Toluhi, 2001:112).

Materialism

The usage of the concept “materialism” here does not apply to the philosophical trend or knowledge which sees materialism as the only scientific philosophical trend. It is rather “a prevailing pattern of desire for more sensory enjoyments, material possessions or physical comfort, at the expense of any higher moral or spiritual values or concerns” (Gordon, 1998:400).

Theoretical Framework

This sub-theme explains the general attitude of citizens towards the formation of patriotic ideals considered under “Functionalism theory”. This is a process of the investigation of the relationships of part of society to each other and to society as a whole. Functionalists

such as Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) saw society in an organic sense. That is, society can be compared to a living organism. They argued that the various parts of the society work together just like the human body for the benefit of society as a whole. Emphasis here is placed on moral consensus in maintaining order and stability in society. “Order” and “balance” the functionalist's regard are required in a state which is equal to “Social equilibrium” grounded in moral consensus among members of society (Ajir,2009; Egbunu, 2009).

Accordingly, therefore, “religion being an instrument of sacralization, therefore, meets these requirements. Social life is made possible through the expression, maintenance and reinforcement of sentiments or value that form the collective conscience (Egbunu, 2009:17). Here, patriotism becomes the moral and religious sentiment on which services of valuable ends and morally legitimate means of attaining them is fulfilled. Durkheim believed that religion affirms peoples adherence to cores of social values, thereby contributing to the maintenance of social cohesion (Ajir, 2009).

There is also the “Social Action” theory which pays greater attention to action and interaction of members of society in forming those structures. While functionalist theory places emphasis on the structures that underpin society and influences human action, social action concentrates on analysis of how individual actors behave or orient themselves towards each other in society (Ajir 2009). Mead George Herbert (1863-1931) spearheaded a deviation from Max Weber who acknowledged the existence of social structures (classes, parties, status, groups etc). Mead called this “symbolic interactionism” – the theory of concern with language and meaning (Ajir, 2009). Mead argued that human rely on shared symbolic and understanding in their interactions with each other. It directs its attention to the fact that interpersonal interaction and how it is used to make sense of what others say and do. They stress that face to face interaction of everyday life and the role such interaction creates in society and its institutions (Ajir, 2009). This could be true of patriotism especially because of its traditional meaning of 'fatherland' which is a symbol for allegiance to a bodily father as well as attachment to physical land to which all efforts must be made to defend, protect, love and obey the laws emanating from such a moral and spiritual union.

The Morality of Patriotism in Scriptures

Morality deals with a broad spectrum of analysis of issues pertaining to human conducts. Morality can be defined as “the body of rules supported by the prevalent opinion of the community (to which the individual belongs) at any given time.” (Appadorai, 1982:64). Morality comes from a latin root *Moralis* which means “the custom or ways of life (William Barclay in Ilori, n.d:5). The term is also used to refer to conduct itself and ethics or ethical to refer to the study of moral conduct.

Patriotism, a moral category consists of human characteristics of love, service dedicated towards one's country's goals and aspirations. Dzurgba (2000:9) therefore specifically mentions that the love of one's country requires exhibition of such personal qualities of impartiality, tolerance, loyalty, honesty, faithfulness, fairness, sincerity, justice, integrity,

dutifulness, commitment, dedication and so on. The patriot sees himself or herself as part and parcel of the state, his country's goals, aspirations, progress and problems from a personal point of view which drives him to involvement and participation in the spirit of love and service (Dzurgba, 2000).

Biblical ethics or ethics in scriptures therefore necessarily provide the substratum for take-off and growth of patriotism in so many ways. According to Jones in Egbunu (2009:87), therefore “Christian patriotism” tries to uphold that citizens of heaven are not bound to manmade laws, because (political) patriotism, is the love of country and the Christian's country is the “heavenly country.” Christian patriotism, therefore, means love of heavenly country and true patriotism for him is “the spirit that, originating in love of country, prompts to obedience to its laws; to the support and defence of its existence, rights and institutions, and to the promotion of its welfare. An important point to take home here is that God is Sovereign Ruler over all nations. His own people cannot be categorized as Americans or Nigerians but wherever they are He cares for them if they obey his commands. In Romans 13:1-5; cf 1Peter 2:13-17 the Bible states:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrong doer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2002).

The 'transcendental patriotism' to which Christians belong can be diagrammatically express thus:

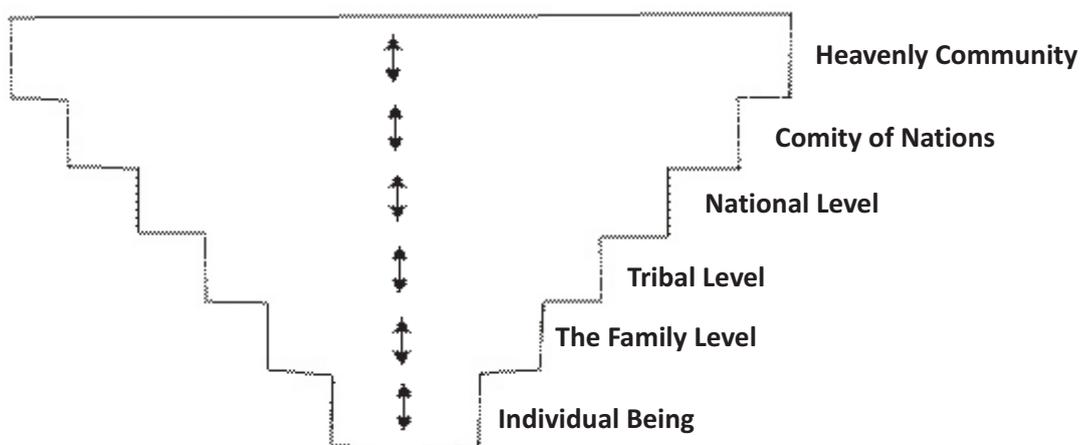


Fig. 1 Fluid Levels of Transcendental Patriotism

The Need for Transcendental Patriotism in Nigeria

Transcendental patriotism is a moral ideal that countries desire. Though they only desire the national patriotism as often preached by our leaders. However, patriotism- a strong love for one's country and the readiness to defend and protect the honour of that country above personal convenience is not a dose for citizens alone but leaders as well (Toluhi, 2001). In Nigeria for instance, in our national ethics, these moral concepts are outlined to be vigorously pursued namely, Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labour, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self-reliance and Patriotism (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

However, beyond all these Nigerians need to practice transcendental patriotism is because even when our leaders fail to provide electricity, pipe-borne water as well as the provisions of medical facilities in our hospitals, the Almighty God has not left us. As a matter of cosmological laws and provisions, we have always received lights from our heavenly bodies, the rains are always here with us and have helped us produce bumper harvests all year round including dry-season farming. The trees, shrubs and grasses have naturally helped us to overcome our health challenges without recourse to man-made, Western or Orthodox hospital medicine. God has been protecting, providing and guiding all Nigerians from the harsh realities of nature. Africa and indeed Nigeria are situated on the Pre-Cambrian rock that does not allow the constant or regular occurrence of earthquakes and the likes.

God is a patriotic God because even when men are not faithful to him, He still supplies them of their needs, unlike in humans where leaders refuse to do the same where they have no legitimacy or followership, though they claim they belong to everybody in leadership.

Materialism as Unpatriotic and Pejorative Act in Nigeria

From the definition of materialism provided above, anybody who has nursed and practised the above becomes subversive not only to nationalistic and moral conduct but above all Godly theocratic standards. It can be seen as corruption which is by definition “any act that negates the principles of accountability and transparency, and ethical and moral standards in the course of responsibility discharge or social interaction in both public and private sectors of the economy” (Orngu, 2006:11). Corruption has been prohibited in our laws just like unpatriotic acts have been discouraged. Unpatriotic acts are not encouraged because they are pejorative and subversive to national development and God's sovereign leadership. Unpatriotic acts include putting aside the country's well-being and focusing instead on personal, familial and ethnic well-being which is distinctively unethical.

The capitalist economy does not allow parents to stay at home to check some of the excesses that their children indulge in when they are absent. They prefer to wander unnecessarily in search for material things as noted by Ker (2002:43) that Nigerians “are influenced by material considerations.” There is frankly nothing wrong with having material things especially when you are guided by the law of the land and moral

consciousness to operate and have property and other material things. It becomes a cause to worry and inimical to societal living when as Utov (2000:30) puts it, "... persons so over-emphasise possession on the personal level that they become blinded to the relative rules of their surrounding and associations."

Materialism has become the 'matter' for all who would want to be acknowledged and respected. It has bought land disputes and disagreements over material things. Utov (2000:18) once again avails us of this information that,

Most ...men or women struggle to possess a large farm each year ...this gives rise, in the final analysis, to greater tension over land acquisitions. When such educated and working class Tiv amass wealth and higher standings in the federal and state services, they nonetheless come home to grab more land that is due to their families, to try their lands on mechanised agriculture and the building of expensive mansions.

The above statement was made concerning the Tiv of Central Nigeria, but it can be conveniently generalized to showcase what is happening in Nigeria in the rural and urban settlements.

In the civil service, the corrupt nature and attitude of the workers is alarming. Okau (2003) frankly points to the fact that many people were optimistic that the passing of the bill aimed at eliminating corruption and official malpractices in Nigeria would go a long way in bringing the civil servants back to sanity thereby creating a society where achievement would be the basis for social and economic mobility. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case and "the situation has worsened that civil servants "sell" jobs to their relatives and friends while they tell the public that there is an embargo on employment" (Okau, 2003:82).

In recent times, there have been reported cases of pension funds misappropriated, mismanaged or misapplied deliberately. Stories of the diversion of these funds to high interest yielding fixed deposit accounts for very selfish reasons. In some cases, such funds are misapplied to settle contractors for jobs done under the capital vote (Odocha, 2012). In the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (1999:105) it has been stated that "The prevailing situation of economic injustice in Nigeria has been blamed on rampant corruption, especially among public office-holders... buttressed by recent shocking revelations of amounts of public funds that were stolen by highly placed government officials including a former head of state." The military has a large share of the blame for the pursuit of materialism. From Gen. Gowon till the exit of the military in politics during the Gen. Adulsalam years, the military has "corruptly enriched themselves at the public expenses" (Elaigwu in Orngu, 2006:36). The worst case has been the "celebrated major financial scams of Abacha which include the debt buyback involving Ajaokuta Steel Rolling Mill; the \$2.2 billion discovered in Abacha's Swiss accounts in 1999; the over \$1 billion recovered from Abacha's family and cronies as at May 2000, etc. Abacha's record on corruption still unfolds" (Orngu,2006:44). Egbunu (2009:70) simply underscores this materialistic disposition of the military where he states that "... military regimes are

noted for wanton embezzlement of government funds.”

Towards a New Patriotism in Nigeria

It cannot be denied that patriotism exists in Nigeria. It can be found in the records of the constitution, several other documents, the National Anthem, the National Pledge and so on. These we classify as humanistic patriotism in national colour. However, the “Transcendental Patriotism” we yearn for is a religious type whose ideals are transcendent. Oji (1982:17) captures the mindset of this new patriotism thus:

... an Ethical Revolution for Nigeria... and fundamental change of a long-term decisive impact, to move this nation steadily and permanently in a discernible new direction of self-reliance and dedication to excellence in leadership, in discipline, in orderliness, in hardwork, in honesty, in morality, in mutual respect and tolerance, along with the submission of our citizenry to God in national affairs and personal pursuits.

Our conviction about a transcendental patriotism lies in the belief that the highest achievement man can do is rooted in spiritual and moral spheres of life. It is a religious patriotism whose beliefs have through the ages been the main anchor of morality, providing the necessary sanction and helping to transit it from generation to generation (Nwabueze, 1993). The Christian, Islamic and African Traditional Religion acknowledges this. That is the ideal that, God rewards the faithful and punishes the sinners.

Under Islamic ethics, God is the centre and the call for universal brotherhood is acknowledged. All human beings are creatures of God and they owe him the duty of serving Him and leading upright lives before him as stated in Sura 5:9 “Be careful of your duty to God, For God is aware of what you do.” This is equally stated in Sura 49:13 that “The most honourable among you in the sight of God is the best of you in conduct; God is all-knowing, all-wise.” God demands justice, compassion and mercy in our dealings with other people (Omeregbe, 1999:57/58).

African ethics is equally ontological in nature and transcends to reality or being that is called God. African Morality according to Ozumba (1995:57) “is therefore fashioned or tailored by the interplay of human and divine forces.” The relationship between religion and morality in traditional African understanding can, therefore, be comprehended where “the divine part in him urges him to seek after God and at the same time to maintain fellowship with his fellow men (Quarcoopome 1987:162). “Righteousness exalts a nation,” the Bible says. Patriotism especially the transcendental one attached to Godly achievement is the highest any citizen can think about in human existence. The United States of America with her political problems have gone ahead of most nations mainly because of their transcendental patriotism as underscored by Alexis de Tocquville in Nwabueze (1993:255) that,

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious

harbours and her ample rivers, and it was not there; in her fertile fields and great praises, and it was not there, in her rich mines and vast commerce, and it was not there. Not until I went to the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power.

Transcendent patriotism should, therefore, make us see how we attempt to respond to our families, tribal or ethnic, national and international duties than meets the eyes.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, this paper argued that there is a need for Nigerians to shift from materialism and refocus on transcendental patriotism that sees God as the owner of the universe. This has shown that national patriotism goes beyond geographical spheres and establishes right relationship with God first and foremost, then, the humans. When this vertical and horizontal love is demonstrated, poverty, unemployment, youth restiveness and other social problems that have been created by the culture of materialism by our leaders, all and sundry will be greatly minimized. Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are suggested:

- i. All religions should improve their national patriotism by focusing on the transcendental patriotism to bring about a better Nigeria and a peaceful world.
- ii. The parents should know that the family is the foundation for the beginning of this transcendental attitude and must strive to teach their young ones the fulfilment of God laws that transcends human laws.
- iii. For such leaders who are not appealed to by this shift from materialism to transcendental patriotism, punitive measures should be put in place as a sanction, through the legal system to serve as a deterrent to others.
- iv. Meanwhile, our religious leaders should continue to preach against materialism and love of money. We are aware that some religious leaders preach prosperity without considering how it can be attained. Some have even commercialized their worship centres and their laity are watching.

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