

The Love Of Money(2) VANITY OF FALSE RICHES

“THAT which is ill got, though it may increase much, will not last long. A man may perhaps, raise a great estate in a little time, by usury and extortion, fraud and oppression of the poor, but it will not continue; he gathers it for himself, but it shall prove to have been gathered for somebody else that he has no kindness for,” says Henry.

We have always made it quite clear that it is not a sin for one to be rich. Solomon, who himself was the richest king in his days, said: “The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it.” (Proverbs 10: 22) But the trouble with many people in our time is that they amass wealth through fraud, bribery and corruption, oppression of the poor and other evil means.

The God’s Kingdom Society (GKS) had long foreseen that Nigeria would, sooner or later, be plunged into chaos because of the excesses of certain politicians and some godless people who thought that money was all that mattered in life. They therefore stopped at nothing in making themselves, by hook or by crook, to be rich. Thus many others in the public services and in private lives developed an unrestricted bent towards material acquisition, and the Nigerian society became infested with bribery and corruption and their attendant evils. Indeed, the Bible says: “He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.” – Proverbs 28: 22.

GKS Vindicated

Our warnings against the godless and materialistic tendencies and ideologies of the politicians and their followers, before and after Nigerian Independence, were not heeded; rather we were called names. Yes, “the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard”. (Ecclesiastes 9: 16) But how is it today? has the GKS not been vindicated?

We can recall that as far back as 1958, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe admitted at the banned NCNC Executive Committee meeting held at the Lagos City College, that they had followed the “SELFISH DESIRES OF OUR OWN HEARTS”. This happened when there was an internal wrangle in the party. He asked his colleagues in that meeting to close their eyes while he read this prayer:

“Our Father in heaven, we pray that You save us from ourselves. The world that You made for us, to live in peace we have made into an armed camp. We live in fear of war to come...We have turned from You to go our selfish way. We have broken Your commandments and denied Your truth. We have left your altars to serve the false gods of money and pleasure and power. Forgive us and help us. Now, darkness gathers around us and we are confused in all our counsels...” (Vide the Daily Times of June 16, 1958, page 16 – italics ours)

Let the lovers of money read over again and ponder the above prayer.

It is a pity that some of the very ills, which include bribery and corruption, that led to the fall of the First Republic are still rearing their ugly heads in Nigeria up till today. Many people are

hypocrites. For while they pay lip-services to the cause of Nigerian unity, they perpetrate the evils that can ruin the nation, and make difficult for the honest ones the task of keeping Nigeria united.

New Order

When the Military Government came into power, it promised among other things that “in the new order of things, there should be no place for subjugation of personal service to personal aggrandisement, nepotism and corruption”. This was made known by the former Head of the Military Government, the late Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, at a meeting in State House, Lagos, in February 1966. (Daily Times, February 22, 1966)

In a “Statement of Policy” broadcast to the nation in August 1966, the present Head of the Military Government, Major- General Yakubu Gowon, stated: “One point which I had not hitherto made abundantly clear is that my Government is very determined to stamp out corrupt practices and to bring to book all persons, including those recently released from detention, against whom there is evidence of improper practice and criminal acts.” (Morning Post, August 10, 1966).

Following this assurance of the Military Government, certain measures have been taken by way of inquiries both at Federal level and in some of the States. The findings made known so far are shocking and reveal how corrupt some people, being looked upon as “gentlemen” and godly, are. We congratulate the Federal and State Military Governments on their bold steps in exposing evils and depriving crooks of their ill-gotten gains.

Some people do not fear God, neither do they learn from past mistakes or the experience of others. Today, bribery and corruption are again in full swing. The sins of those engaged in it shall find them out in God’s time. – Numbers 32: 23.

Addressing a meeting of some officials of Local Government Councils in the Mid- Western State, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Benin City, was reported as saying, “Revenue collectors who should collect taxes to swell the coffers of the council in fact swell their own coffers by taking bribes of 5/- to 10/- from tax defaulters who find this cheaper than paying the normal expected tax of £3: 10/-. As a result the officials get richer and make capital investments all over the place out of proportion to their income level while the council gets poorer and cannot even maintain the rudimentary roads in its area.” (Vide the Mid-Western Nigeria PRESS RELEASE of Thursday August 22, 1968).

Bribe-mongers have formed their own terms and phrases for the purpose of begging for tips or demanding bribes. The saying, “nothing goes for nothing”, is common among them. The words, “kola” and “dash” are their popular synonyms for the word, bribe. You enter an office to ask for something to which you are entitled but the officer in charge, if he is of the corrupt type, will then tell you: “If you know how to ‘walk’, or if you ‘walk’ well, you will get it.” Is it not surprising that a fully grown-up man must have to learn again how to walk in some offices? If you are not the sort of those who are used to such dastardly language or the “kola game”, the officer and his colleagues may even laugh at your “ignorance” for not knowing what people are doing or for not “behaving as a gentleman “.

It is our humble appeal that the Authorities should do everything humanly possible to get rid of this kind of evil men or vicious “beggars” in the public services of the country.

According to the Law Book of God, the Bible, it is not only those whose corrupt practices have come to the open that are guilty of sin, but also those whose offences are hidden. Except those still covered repent thoroughly to the pleasure of God, their “secret sins” shall be revealed in due time and great will be their shame. (Psalm 90: 8; Hebrews 4: 13) St. Paul said: “Some men’s sins are open before hand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that live otherwise cannot be hid.”- 1 Timothy 5: 24, 25.

Another factor that is hardening the hearts of some people in their corrupt dealings is their hope in the secret societies to which they belong. It must be pointed out to such ones that their days are awaiting them. For when their cups of iniquity shall have been filled, God shall deal with them and reward them with the fruit of their doings. No secret society or human effort then can help them.

We believe that there are good people in secret societies. We appeal to such ones not to help the bad characters who, among them, involve themselves in criminal acts. If they do, they will be partakers of their iniquities or crimes; and though they may avert man’s punishment or that of the Government, they CANNOT AVERT OR ESCAPE GOD’S OWN. HE WILL CERTAINLY PUNISH THEM. – Proverbs 11: 21; Isaiah 3: 11; 1 Peter 3: 10-12; Ecclesiastes 12: 13 14.

The Role of the Church

In a situation such as we find in this country, the role of the Church is of paramount importance. Religious leaders must always come out in a straightforward condemnation of evils such as fraud, bribery and corruption, and so forth. Their spiritual responsibilities are very great. This can better be appreciated from the following charge of God to His servant: “So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.”- Ezekiel 33: 7-9.

All those who have been found to be corrupt and others not yet revealed are mostly members of one religious group or another. But what have their leaders done to check their excesses in violation of God’s commandments? It is in this respect many church leaders in Nigeria have been charged with duplicity and as having failed in their spiritual duties.

After the tragic events of January 15, 1966, which resulted in a change of Government, the Baptist Church of Nigeria did a praiseworthy thing in promptly coming out with an open admission of their fault for lying dormant while some of their members who were politicians committed sinful acts in careless freedom. A document captioned, “MEMO OF THE NATIONAL SITUATION” dated February 1st, 1966, and signed by a leader of the Baptist Church, speaks for itself and states in part:

“During the five years when the British no longer determined our policies we have witnessed the effects of sin in various aspects of our national life. We have learnt to accommodate ourselves to acts of selfishness, greed, lusts, pride, corruption, tribalism, deceit. Less and less the freedom we had hoped were inherent in the lives of an independent nation became illusive...

“We Baptists once derived joy as champions of freedom and justice, of truth and honesty. However, our heads are bowed in shame as people observed that the distressing atrocities were committed in the area where our denomination had the strongest influence, where many Baptists were in key positions in Government and quasi-Government bodies. Many of us in the Ministry and in teaching, as well as in other walks of life, become ardent supporters of evil policies and practices in total disregard of Jesus Christ and his demands. We flattered corrupt politicians for personal private profit. We sang their praises in the Assembly of God’s people. We connived at sin. Worst still, when some try to proclaim what they understand the will of God to be-two or three instances of such actually came to our hearing- some frightened Christians warned them to be careful! We are living in fear! Need I extend the catalogue further to indicate how all of us were implicated in the moral confusion of the times? May God forgive us!”

The Baptist Church is not alone in this sort of unchristian attitude in tacitly permitting evil. There are several other religious bodies that are equally guilty, and they know themselves. However, the frankness and sincerity of the Baptist Church in owning its fault is appreciated. May God forgive them as they have prayed. But the GKS – this is no self -praise-on several occasions warned the nation against sin; her Press Release in the Daily Times of September 30, 1960 on the eve of Independence captioned, “Only By Righteousness will Independent Nigeria Survive”, is an instance.

Before the Military take-over in January 1966, the GKS, through her President also warned against the danger ahead if things continued as they were at that time. Copies of the warning letter were sent to the late Prime Minister, the then Regional Governors and Premiers, Dr. Orizu, Acting President of the Federal Government, religious leaders and leading politicians in the country. But the warning was not heeded. Today, it is all of us – the guilty and the stubborn ones as well as the innocent – that are suffering! May God have mercy on us.

Although the Military Government has promised to stamp out corruption, we will be expecting too much to think that it can go beyond the limit of human strength. But it can do and achieve much with the support and co-operation of godly, honest people. The power to wipe out evil from the entire surface of the earth, rests with God alone. And very soon in this our Age, He, through Jesus Christ, will take action towards this end, and ALL INIQUITY will come to an end.

The Remedy

Chief Justice Ademola was reported as saying “that bribery, though a dangerous disease, is curable”, And he added, “It can be cured only through a deep spiritual awakening, through the Ministry of the Christian Church,” (African Challenge of March 1962, emphasis ours)

We agree with the Chief Justice, Anyone who claims to be a Christian and still indulges in bribery is not yet converted. St. Paul admonished that we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we might prove “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”. (Romans 12: 1,2) And he further said: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things (including fraud, bribery and corruption) are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” – 2 Corinthians 5: 17.

We have said enough to expose the vanity of false riches and the dangers of bribery and corruption. If those still engaging in them do not repent, all they acquire through bribery and corruption shall be destroyed by God. As it is written: “For the congregation of hypocrites shall be desolate, and fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery, They conceive mischief, and bring forth vanity, and their belly prepareth deceit.” – Job 15: 34, 35.

Our humble advice is that those who have been giving or receiving bribes should repent of their sins so that God may forgive them. There is no sense in continuing to do that which always pricks your conscience, incurs the anger of men, lowers your prestige, and will eventually bring you the condemnation of God. It was the Psalmist who prayed: “Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide. Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men: in whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes,” – Psalm 26: 1, 9-10.

In Isaiah 55: 7, there is the warning that the wicked should forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his evil thoughts; that he should return to God and He will have mercy upon him. And Jesus Christ directed an assuring call to all mankind when he said: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” – Matthew 11: 28-30.

No matter how many and serious your past sins may be, take an advantage of this opportunity you have of hearing or reading this sermon, and REPENT and retrace your steps to Jesus so that his salvation and other blessings may be your lot.

It pays to fear God, and to lead a godly and sober life. We cannot end this sermon without reminding you of the following admonition of St. Paul: “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” – 1 Timothy 6: 6-10.

And to every true Christian the apostle added this exhortation: “But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, where- unto thou art also called and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.” – 1 Timothy 6: 11, 12.

The remedy for the disease of bribery and corruption lies, therefore, in the fear of God by which “men depart from evil”. (Proverbs 16: 6) Christ’s warning is that men should “beware of covetousness”. – Luke 12: 15- 21; see also Hebrews 13: 5, 6.

O God, help us Thy sheep to keep Thy commandments always as eloquent evidence of our love for Thee and Thy Son our Redeemer so that we may be saved. Amen.