

Complicity of Religion in Legalizing Corruption: Perspective from an Emerging Economy

Authors : S. Opadere Olaolu

Abstract : Religion, as a belief-system, has been with humanity for a long time. It has been recognised to impact the lives of individuals, groups, and communities that hold it dear. Whether the impact is regarded as positive or not depends on the assessor. Thus, for reasons of likely subjectiveness, possible irrationality, and even outright deliberate abuse, most emerging economies seek to follow the pattern of separating the State from religion; yet it is certain that the influence of religion on the State is incontrovertible. Corruption, on the other hand, though difficult to define in precise terms, is clearly perceptible. It could manifest in very diverse ways, including the abuse of a position of trust for the gain of an individual, or of a group with shared ulterior motive. Religion has been perceived, among others, as a means to societal stability, marital stability, infusion of moral rectitude, and conscience with regards to right and wrong. In time past, credible and dependable characters reposed largely and almost exclusively with those bearing deep religious conviction. Even in the political circle, it was thought that the involvement of those committed to religion would bring about positive changes, for the benefit of the society at large. On the contrary, in recent times, religion has failed in these lofty expectations. The level of corruption in most developing economies, and the increase of religion seem to be advancing *pari passu*. For instance, religion has encroached into political space, and vice versa, without any differentiable posture to the issue of corruption. Worse still, religion appears to be aiding and abetting corruption, overtly and/or covertly. Therefore, this discourse examined from the Nigerian perspective—as a developing economy—, and from a multidisciplinary stand-point of Law and Religion, the issue of religion; secularism; corruption; romance of religion and politics; inability of religion to exemplify moral rectitude; indulgence of corruption by religion; and the need to keep religion in private sphere, with proper checks. The study employed primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources included the Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as amended; judicial decisions; and the Bible. The secondary sources comprised of information from books, journals, newspapers, magazines and Internet documents. Data obtained from these sources were subjected to content analysis. Findings of this study include the breach of constitutional provisions to keep religion out of State affairs; failure of religion to curb corruption; outright indulgence of corruption by religion; and religion having become a political tool. In conclusion, it is considered apposite still to keep the State out of religion, and to seek enforcement of the constitutional provisions in this respect. The stamp of legality placed on overt and covert corruption by religion should be removed by all means.

Keywords : corruption, complicity, legalizing, religion

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