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USE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE PRESERVATION OF PERSONAL REPUTATION BY YOUNG CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article explores the dual nature of social media as a powerful tool for communication, opinion formation, and business promotion while highlighting its potential for reputational harm. It examines the various detrimental publications on social media, such as lying, contumely, rash judgment, detraction, calumny, tale-bearing, and violation of secrecy, which can tarnish an individual's hard-earned reputation. The study specifically addresses the involvement of young Nigerian Christians in these harmful practices, explaining them as violations of the Eighth Commandment against bearing false witness, as well as the Seventh and Tenth Commandments. This moral theological exposition aims to guide young Christians to avoid harming the personal reputation of people in the social media space.

Keywords: *Young Nigerian Christians, media, preservation, personal reputation, social media.*



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Introduction

The social media space is an invention that came with very many advantages. Aduloju and Ojo (2017) posit that the social media space is a vital tool for different kinds of communication, equipped to share information, and provides tools for active participation, moulding opinions, and connecting individuals and communities. They emphasise that the social media space has become one of the most important means of communication in recent times. Also, they point out that the social media space is distinctively peculiar because it is a user-driven, highly accessible platform that facilitates the users' sharing of thoughts, photos, videos, and stories with targeted receivers and allows unhindered interaction between the sender and the receiver. Furthermore, they argue that the social media space is an easy avenue for networking among people regardless of distance, allowing communication in real-time and thereby providing an avenue for and boosting business transactions.

However, Aduloju and Ojo (2017) lament that morals and values have fallen prey to social media. Predators lurk in chatrooms and expose innocent, unsuspecting young people to things like pornography and other vices. One of the areas identified by this article is injuries done, particularly by young Nigerian Christians, to people's reputations through libellous, defamatory publications like calumny, detraction, contumely, the assassination of character, lies, tale bearing, etc. Some of the perpetrators of these practices are content creators who constitute themselves into what Egere (2024, p. 21) refers to as "Social Media Courts". This means that when a person whose reputation has been hurt by such publications decides to seek redress, the publisher is made to publish a retraction.

The damaging of another person's reputation is a violation, mainly of the eighth commandment that forbids the bearing of false witness against one's neighbour (Exo. 20:16) (CCC, Article 8). It also violates the seventh and tenth commandments because it involves robbing a person of his hard-earned reputation. This article is a moral theological work aimed at assisting young Nigerian Christians and all who desire to act in good conscience to know the grave nature of the ills of the harm done to the personal reputation of others in the social media space, just as it is the case in the physical space. Using a critical moral theological methodology, the issues involved in damaging personal reputation are exposed and critically analysed,

and then the Christian moral implications are clearly pointed out. The study is mainly qualitative in nature and relies on secondary sources.

Personal Reputation

The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (2004) defines 'personal' as something that pertains to or is characteristic of a particular person, something that is not general or public. In theology, reputation is people's concept or image regarding another person's life and moral standing. In moral theology, reputation is called a 'good name'. Thus, it is usually qualified as 'a good reputation'. It is the good opinion people have concerning a person's wisdom and virtue (Pazhayampallil, 2004). Reputation refers to the opinion held by people about how good or bad someone or something is; the opinion held by people about a person, something, or a place as being good or bad (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2007). Reputation is the opinion many hold about a person's life and behaviour (www.newadvent.org), and it is usually based on how the person has conducted himself or herself. This means that each person must conduct himself or herself in a manner that would earn him or her a good reputation. Once a person has earned a reputation, they are entitled to its preservation by others. In this article, therefore, personal reputation is an entitlement. It is a good name to which each human being is entitled.

Social Media Space

In this article, social media refers to websites that include modern and emergent online means of communication used by large groups of people to share information and develop social and/or professional contacts. These are mainly electronic forms of communication, like websites for social networking and micro-blogging, by which users create online communities, thereby sharing information, ideas, personal messages, and content like videos (Bala, 2017).

Explaining in more specific terms, Aduloju and Ojo (2017, p. 227) cite Kitzman, who posits that social media is "a group of internet-based applications that are built on the ideological foundation of web 2.0 which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated contents". Social media depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. Being user-driven, social media

facilitates the sender's exchange of thoughts, photos, videos, and stories with targeted receivers (Aduloju & Ojo, 2017).

Social media networking provides communication among people regardless of distance, making it easy to share information and providing opportunities for real-time conversation. The systems derive their name as social media from their nature and function of allowing communication with friends, family, and co-workers easily and effectively. By its nature, social media is morally neutral, neither bad nor good in itself. The morality lies in its use (Aduloju & Ojo, 2017). The moral theological issue addressed by this work is the use of social media for publishing content that is injurious to personal reputation.

Preservation of Reputation

Every human being is entitled to a good reputation. It is a fundamental moral right that should not be violated but should be respected and preserved by all and sundry. Preserving personal reputation requires respect for people's good names and forbids every attitude and word likely to cause them injury (CCC, no. 2477). Preserving the reputation of others is part of the gamut of respect for their honour. The scriptures encourage each person to build a good reputation because it regards personal reputation as something very precious to be cherished above all riches (Prov. 22:1). A good reputation is better than precious ointment (Ecclesiastes 7:1). The preference here does not undermine the value of riches. Undeniably, riches are good, just as good reputation is also good. The point, however, is that if one has to choose between the two, one is to choose a good name. King David was highly loved and pleasing to the people of Israel because he maintained a good reputation since his life was guided by wisdom (2 Sam. 3:36) ("A Good Name is to be Chosen", 2017).

Personal reputation is something each person strives hard to earn and sustain. St. Paul expects Church elders to be of a good reputation (1 Tim. 3:7). Personal reputation is to be carefully safeguarded because it remains longer with a person (Sir 41:12). A person's good reputation and faith are the two things that accompany a person to life beyond (Rev. 14:13). A Christian who has a good reputation is a shining light in the world which leads to the praise of God by others (Mt. 5:16). Similarly, a Christian with a good reputation promotes the cause of the gospel. After all, he gives no scandal (1 Cor. 10:32) (Peschke, 1996). St. Paul urges anyone who loves

God to be ambitious for a good name (Philip. 4:8). A person with a good name lives with a good conscience. St. Paul, himself, did everything possible to live in good conscience towards God and men (Acts 24:16; 2 Cor. 1:12). He never hesitated to defend his good reputation against anyone who attempted to downgrade it (1 Cor. 9; 2 Cor. 11) (Peschke, 1996). According to Peschke (1996), however, Christians are too circumspect about trying to live a good life merely to seek the praises of people. If a person's good deeds are motivated only by the desire for praise, while genuine love of God and neighbour is lacking, then no virtue is attained at all. Jesus condemned this attitude (Mt. 23:1-7).

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council enumerate the right to a good reputation alongside the necessities of life which each human being is entitled to, such as food, clothing, housing, etc. (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 26). Therefore, each person has a right to good esteem, especially one who merits it (Peschke, 1996). Any violation of a person's reputation is an injustice, grave, or venial according to the degree of harm done. Such an injustice involves the obligation for restitution as far as possible (Attwater, 1997). Reputation is built over time. And when it has been built, no one has to destroy it. St. James forbids humans to speak evil against one another (James 4:11). Such behaviour, according to St. Paul, is characteristic of pagans and people of the end time (Rom. 1:30, 2 Tim. 3:3). Grisez (1993), explains that a good reputation is the object of basic human rights. He elucidates that whatever one has been able to produce by exerting one's labour is indefeasibly personal to one. This is the case with a person's good reputation. It is the product of the person's meritorious struggle. Therefore, whatever is done by thought, word, or action to dispossess a person with this hard-earned reputation is an injustice. The gravity of the injury is determined by the degree of harm done.

Considering the seriousness of this injustice, St. Thomas Aquinas classifies it as being greater than theft. This is because, among all external possessions, a person's reputation holds primacy (www.newdent.org). A good reputation earned over time is a person's property and must not be robbed of it. Gonsalves (1985) affirms that a good reputation is one of the goods proper to man and that the loss of it can imply total ruin. He opines, however, that one does not need to resort to the use of brute force to preserve a good reputation. According to him, truth is the most effective weapon to defend a good reputation. However, a reasonable, legitimate

moral force may be used if it is the only way to close the mouth of a defamer who refuses to stop harming one's reputation after all fraternal means have been used. He recommends that the force to be employed could be physical but proportionally exerted and not arbitrary.

Moral Obligation for Preservation of Reputation

Mazza (2023) posits that putting a price on a person's reputation is difficult. He explains that the importance of a good name is very clear throughout the Scriptures and sacred traditions. Yet, in the modern Internet world, especially the social media space, a person's lifelong hard-earned reputation can be destroyed just in a matter of minutes. One finds the bad culture of attacking people's reputations in the social media space.

The Latin expression, *Bona fama*, used in Canon 220 of *The Code of Canon Law* (1983), is translated as "a good reputation". The canon expresses a person's right to enjoy a good name. This right comes from nature, a special dignity, and is proper for the human person. The object of the canon is the protection of personal reputation from illegitimate harm. However, a person's right to a good reputation may be compromised in defending the common good or another value. For instance, in the defence of the Church or an innocent person, one is expected to act or speak up even if the reputation of another person, especially one who is not innocent, is at stake. The intention here is to defend the greater good and not ruin a person's reputation (*New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, 2003). Mazza (2023) refers to the work of Ángel Rodríguez Luño, who points to findings in human psychology which reveal that "the desire to be esteemed is firmly rooted in the human psyche". This means that each normal human being naturally strives for a good reputation (Mazza, 2023). Therefore, when a person has worked hard to earn a good reputation, it is to be respected by all. It is the person's precious possession and should not be robbed of it.

Harm to Personal Reputation in the Social Media Space

Nowadays, harm to personal reputation is done either by thoughts or physical actions like spoken words or by publications in the media, including modern electronic channels like social media. Marouf, Ajwad, and Ashrafi (2019) confirm that many people on social media make defaming comments, make false accusations, start controversies, and spread fake news or rumours that damage people's reputations. Unfortunately,

many young Nigerian Christians are involved in this practice, and they assume it is normal and a right.

The culpability of behaviours that are injurious to personal reputation has two possible dimensions. First, the publisher of the reputation-harming story is culpable for generating such information. Second, the reader of the defamatory publication is culpable for forming a negative image of the victim without verification. Some of the behaviours that damage personal reputation include:

i. Lying

Lying means “to speak or act against the truth to lead into error, someone who has the right to know the truth” (CCC, no. 2483). Jone (1993) posits that “A lie is a word, sign or action by which one expresses the contrary of what he thinks or wills (usually in order to deceive others)”. The purpose of speech is to communicate known truths to others. Any deliberate intention of leading another person into error by telling them things contrary to the truth is an injury to justice and charity (CCC, no. 2485). A lie is a speech to another person which is contrary to what the person speaking has in mind. The person speaking intends to deceive his or her listener (Peschke, 1996). Bok (1999) talks of a lie as an undertaking to deceive others intentionally by communicating messages meant to mislead them.

Pazhayampallil (2004) explains that a lie is a voluntary utterance that does not correspond to what is on the speaker's mind. The measure of harm of a lie is in the gravity of the intended effect of the lie. The culpability of a lie is greater when the intention of lying entails deadly consequences for those being led astray. According to Pazhayampallil, lying could be injurious, profitable, or jocose. An injurious lie causes harm either to God or to another person. This is also called a malicious lie and is a grave sin. A profitable lie is spoken in stringent circumstances to benefit a person by relieving the person from distress or misery. Notwithstanding, this kind of lie is still a sin but venial. A jocose lie is spoken for amusement. It can be a sin if a jocose lie harms, humiliates, or disgraces another person. When a lie is told under oath, it is perjury (Cogan, 1993).

ii. Contumely

Contumely refers to the contemptuous treatment of a neighbour. It consists of dishonouring a person unjustly in the person's presence or by proxy and thus showing contempt for the person by words or deeds, by commission or omission (Jone, 1993). Contumely is the violation of a man's honour, done

by the commission in acts practically carried out like striking, spitting, or any other such acts. It is done by omission when acts of honour are withheld (Pazhayampallil, 2004). For instance, ignoring a person who stretches a hand for a handshake is contumely. Also, spiteful criticism and fault finding are all contumelious. The list could be long according to local customs. Contumely is of higher gravity when done to a senior, elder, or superior. For example, refusing to stand as a mark of honour or sitting down to receive a handshake from an elder, senior, or superior.

Contumely can be done to an individual or a group. The person or group does not necessarily have to be present. The dishonour could be done by a contemptuous treatment of a representative, picture, or other symbols like a flag, etc., in a way that it will come to the knowledge of the person being dishonoured. The gravity of a contumelious act depends on the status and dignity of the person being dishonoured and the gravity of the character of the words, actions, signs, or omissions by which the disrespect is expressed (Peschke, 1996).

iii. Rash Judgement

This is when a person, “even tacitly, assumes as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral fault of a neighbour” (CCC, no. 2477). Rash judgement is “An act of the mind that, on insufficient evidence, attributes something morally discreditable to another or denies something morally credible” (Encyclopedia.com). It is affirmation or denial without certainty (Encyclopedia.com). According to Jone (1993, no. 379), “Rash judgement is the firm mental assenting, without sufficient reason, to the existence of some moral defect in another.”

Anyone who suspects another person without sufficient reason is guilty of rash judgement (Cogan, 1993, lesson 42, question 3). Hardon (1985, p. 359) defines rash judgement as an “unquestioned conviction about another person’s bad conduct without adequate grounds”. He explains the culpability of rash judgement; “The sinfulness of rash judgement lies in the hasty imprudence with which the critical appraisal is made and in the loss of reputation that a person suffers in the eye of the one who judges adversely” (Hardon, 1985, p. 359).

To avoid culpability of rash judgement, the CCC recommends that one should be discreet, as far as possible, to ensure careful interpretation of

one's neighbour's thoughts, words, and deeds favourably (CCC, no. 4278). Noteworthy is that, before verifying the other person's interpretations, it does not constitute a rash judgement if, for reasons of safety, one exercises some level of caution occasioned by doubt or suspicion upon perceiving danger to one's life.

iv. Detraction

This is also known as defamation. It means revealing something about another person that is true but harms the person's reputation. No one is allowed to disclose another person's secret faults and defects. There is no moral justification for disclosing secret information about a person's personal life, even if it is true. This can only be done where a gravely proportionate good is involved (Hardon, 1985). Detraction is an act of unjust denigration of another person's good name. In detraction, the person's reputation is usually harmed in the person's absence. Detraction can be done to a physical or a judicial person, like a religious house or a congregation. Again, it can be done even to people who are dead, even though it is a lighter sin than when it is done to a living person. There may be no defamation if the person spoken about is not known and may not be known at all. Those who willingly listen to detractors are liable (Pazhayampallil, 2004).

Trese (2007) posits that a person who listens to defamation with pleasure, even if the person says nothing, is guilty of detraction. He calls this the sin of the ear. If we listen just out of curiosity, the sin is venial. If we listen out of hatred for the person in question, the sin is mortal. When a person's reputation is destroyed by detraction in our presence, we are to try to change the topic or show that we are disinterested in listening by leaving. According to St. Thomas Aquinas (2000), detraction takes away a person's good name. It is a very grave act. Aquinas holds that a detractor will not be saved unless he repents and restores the reputation of the person he destroyed. Peschke (1996) argues further that defamation is more grievous than theft since a good name is better than wealth (Prov. 22:1).

Pazhayampallil (2004) names three instances where the revealing of another's secret faults may be permissible. First, at the confessional or during counselling, one may divulge information about injury received through the faults of another to alleviate or get rid of one's sorrow and attain solace. Even at this, it is preferable to avoid mentioning names. This

exception is allowed based on the understanding that the seal of confession binds confessors, and the counsellor is bound by the vow of confidentiality not to divulge such information. Second, it is permissible for historians to publish stories of past criminal deeds of people to instruct and correct future generations. Third, in public life, newspapers may publish crime stories. They may also criticise public officials' mistakes while carrying out their office work. In a democracy, public leaders are criticised for their actions and inactions to keep them alive to their duties. Trese (2007) adds to the list of exceptions. Fourth, for prevention, like reporting to a father certain bad attitudes of the child from which he has refused to change after being spoken to several. Fifth, for prevention or security reasons, like reporting to the police someone coming out of a burgled store.

v. Calumny

Calumny is the act of imputing a false defect on another person, knowing so well that they are false (Peschke, 1996). In calumny, the person imputing the defects knows that he or she is lying about an innocent person but chooses to do it to injure the person's good name. Calumny is also called slander (Attwater, 1997). Calumny is a sin against justice, charity, and truthfulness. It requires restitution involving retraction and a sincere effort to restore that good name (McBrien, 1995).

Trese (2007) submits that the harm done to personal reputation is worse than stealing a tangible material property. For instance, if a person's money is stolen, he argues, the man may be angry and sad. But he can go out there and still earn some money and probably even more. However, when a shadow is cast on a man's reputation, he is robbed of something that no amount of sweat in this world can restore. A person is guilty of calumny even if the victim is unaware.

vi. Tale Bearing

This has to do with reporting to someone something that is said of him or her by another person that is unfavourable to the person. Tale bearing is similar to detraction because they both disclose true but secret information. However, the two differ in intentions. The intention for detraction is to harm the victim's good name. In the case of tale-bearing, the intention is to sever relationships and create enmity between people, even though damage is still done to the person's reputation. Tale bearing could be more grievous than detraction because it instigates discord and enmity (Pazhayampallil,

2004). Trese (2007) refers to tale-bearing as the sin of a “troubled-loving busybody” who tells someone what another says about him to cause disaffection and mistrust.

vii. Violation of Secrecy

A secret is some hidden knowledge about a person that is in the possession of another person and should not be divulged. Revealing secrets causes serious harm or sorrow to the person who is so affected. An exception here is that parental authority confers on parents the right to read letters of their children who are minors and are legitimately under their authority. Worthy of mention is that it is not permitted for husbands and wives to read each other's letters against each other's will. However, when suspicion exists, which constitutes a danger to matrimonial life, it is reasonable to read each other's letters against each other's will to clear the suspicion (Pazhayampallil, 2004). Trese commends that revealing secrets usually have to do with information that has been entrusted to a person who has an obligation to secrecy. Also, professionals like doctors, lawyers, counsellors, etc., are expected to keep secrets. This obligation further includes those with religious callings, like priests at the confessional. Charity forbids divulging secrets because it offends or hurts the person in question (Trese, 2007).

Moral Theological Argumentation on Preservation of Personal Reputation

Preserving people's reputations is a serious moral burden on everyone in all areas of human life, including social media. It is important to reiterate that harm to personal reputation is graver than in the case of the stealing of material property. A victim of a material theft may feel hurt but can always work to replace what has been lost. Moreover, through restitution and reparation, material properties stolen can be restored in part or whole. Sometimes, the restoration can even be more than what was stolen. In the case of grave harm done to personal reputation, the victim is robbed of a good name that can never be restored in its exactness by all the sweat in the world, reparation, restitution, or apologies. The victim lives with the stain all his life, even if the accusation is proven false afterwards.

Harm to personal reputation is an infringement on the eighth commandment, which forbids the bearing of false witness against a neighbour (Exo. 20:16; Deut. 5:20). The function of the eighth

commandment is the protection of the right to a good name (Coppens, www3.nd.edu). This commandment forbids the misrepresentation of truth in our relations with one another. The moral precept flows from the Christian vocation to be holy people who bear witness to God, who is and wills truth (CCC, no. 2464). The Eight Commandments oblige using the power of speech according to God's plan to tell the truth (Cogan, 1993). It forbids lies and spoiling of a person's good name, which is very evil (Walsh, 2005). In this commandment, God forbids anyone to injure his neighbour by word (St. Thomas Aquinas, 2000), verbally or in writing. Therefore, thoughts, words, deeds, and publications in the social media space that harm personal reputation are violations of the Eight Commandment.

Harm to Personal Reputation is also an infringement on the seventh and tenth commandments, which forbid the act of robbing a person of hard-earned goods - material or moral. The two commandments guarantee and protect the right of ownership of property. In morality, property refers to something a person owns or has the right to own (Hardon, 1985). Regarding the seventh commandment, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 2401) teaches one to respect a neighbour's rights to his or her goods. This command requires respect for another's goods in justice and charity. On the tenth Commandment, the Church teaches that the desire to covet another person's goods is the root of theft, robbery, and fraud (CCC, no. 2534).

Discussing the seventh and tenth commandments, Cogan posits that no one is to take anything belonging to another person that the owner would not willingly give. He identifies robbery as one of the types of stealing (Cogan, 1985). On his part, Jone (1993) traces the source of property rights to natural law. He goes on to identify two categories of special objects of ownership. The first category is the goods of body and soul. These constitute the nature of a person, i.e., a person's body and soul are rights proper to each human being by virtue of being human. This category of ownership is indirect because they are directly God's property. Each person is only a custodian. Hence, no one has the prerogative to dispose of them except God. The second category is the goods of honour, reputation, and the goods of fortune. According to Jones, human beings have perfect ownership of these goods.

Drawing from this understanding, personal reputation constitutes one of the properties acquired by each person. In *the Aquinas Catechism* (2000), the

seventh and tenth commandments forbid injuring a neighbour in his or her goods. Personal reputation is one of such goods. Therefore, any behaviour by thought, word, or deed carried out, either physically or in the social media space, which takes a person's reputation is an act of robbery.

Levels of Culpability of Harm to Reputation in the Social Media Space

The harm done to personal reputation in the social media space is the same as in the case of physical space, and the guilt is also the same. There are levels of culpability of harm to another person's reputation in the social media space. First, a person who is the source of the defamatory story is culpable. Most of the defamatory stories published in the social media space have sources. Whoever is the source of a defamatory story that is published in the social media space is guilty of harming the reputation of the victim in question.

Second, the actual publisher of content that damages another person's reputation in the social media space is culpable. Sometimes, however, the publisher may also be the source of the defamatory publication. In this case, the person is culpable at the first and second levels. Third, one who knows about the defamatory publication before it is published and does nothing to stop it is culpable. Sometimes, one may be privileged in one way or the other to know of a plan to publish a reputation-damaging story. Given its damaging effects, a good Christian will dissuade the intending publisher from publishing such a publication. If the person refuses to heed, the Christian must dissociate himself or herself from the intended publication. A Christian who does not dissuade or at least dissociates from an intended reputation-damaging publication is culpable to that extent. Fourth, one who shares defamatory information is culpable. The person is guilty of damaging the victim's reputation by spreading the harmful story. The sharer is guilty of making oneself a willing tool for spreading a defamatory publication.

Repairing Harm Done to Personal Reputation

The harm that is done to a person's reputation is like a spillage of honey, which is very difficult to recover in its original quantity and quality. Damage to a person's reputation in the social media space is hardly repairable. It is best to avoid incurring it by ensuring responsible use of the social media space. Christians should use social media to publish content that promotes their faith. Besides, Christians need to moderate their

presence in the social media space by occasionally staying disconnected to avoid its distraction and the tendency to slide into social media addiction.

Although no action carried out afterwards can ever restore harm done to personal reputation, restitution is obligatory. This can ameliorate the harm done to a victim. In a moral sense, restitution entails reparation for a wrong, whether by returning what had been taken in the case of material possessions or some form of compensation by repairing damage unjustly caused (Hardon, 1985). It is an act of commutative justice by which an injury that is unjustly caused to another person is repaired, or the thing belonging to another, previously taken unjustly, is returned (Pazhayampallil, 2004). Once moral harm has been dealt with, especially when harming a person's reputation, restitution is binding in conscience. Those who can make restitution but fail to do so continue the injury done to their victim (Hardon, 1985).

Trese (2007) insists on the extreme necessity for restitution for harm done to personal reputation by any form of slander, detraction, lying, contumely, revealing secrets, rash judgement, etc. He maintains that anyone who is guilty cannot be forgiven unless the person intends to make good the harm committed to the best of the person's good name. Those who make publications that damage personal reputation commit grave infringements against truth, justice, charity, mercy, and love. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 2487) teaches that these offences entail the duty of reparation, even if the author has been forgiven. The reparation is to be made in private if it is impossible to do it publicly or if making it in public may cause greater harm in the case of infringements of a lower proportion. A person whose personal reputation has been harmed must at least be given moral satisfaction in the name of charity. This means that restitution has no alternative. Trese (2007, p. 306) states:

If I have slandered, I must broadcast the fact that I was grossly mistaken. If I have detracted, I must, by honest praise and pleas for charity, try to outbalance the effects of my detraction. If I have insulted, I must apologise; publicly, if the insult was a public one. If I have violated a secret, I must repair the harm in whatever way I can and as far as I can.

According to Trese (Trese, 2007), these acts of restitution must lead to a renewed determination, manifesting in two resolutions. Firstly, one should never open one's mouth or publish anything in the social media space

except to say or write what one honestly believes is true. Secondly, one is never to speak or publish in the social media space about another person, even the truth about that person, except if what one is saying or publishing is to that person's credit or if the information, though detrimental to the person's character, is needed for grave reasons that concern the common good.

Conclusion

Many of our young Christians are involved in reputation-damaging publications on social media under the guise of freedom of expression, and it appears to be a normal thing. This article has pointed out that boundaries should be respected when exercising that freedom on social media. Christian morality forbids the damaging of the reputation of others. The article has pointed out that a person's reputation is hard-earned, an entitlement and a right that must not be violated. The dignity of a person requires the safeguarding of the reputation of each person. The article discusses the various moral gravity, dimensions, and levels at which these violations take place on social media and points out the depths of culpability for such violations. Once a person's reputation has been damaged, it cannot be restored. This article, however, identifies certain actions that could be taken to repair, to an extent, the damages that have been done.



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