

Emphasis on Dignity of Labour in the Era of Cybercrime: Implications for a Religious Studies Teacher

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Abstract

The contemporary Nigerian society is currently witnessing an era of young people engaging in cybercrime as a means of livelihood. This has led to an era when doing certain legitimate work is taken as disdainful by the young people and many young people wish to be rich overnight. This paper exposes the fact of cybercrime or internet crime in Nigeria. Using virtue ethics theory, the paper holds that poverty, unemployment, poor orientation, peer pressures are among the reasons for internet or cybercrime in Nigeria. The cyber criminals operate in diverse means to get victims who in turn are duped. The Bible is totally against fraudulent means of getting money and not only condemns it but equally meted punishments for such act. This work acknowledges the position of religion in human formation and makes a case for a Christian Religious Studies teacher to be proactive in formation of the conscience and minds of the students by emphasizing on the dignity of labour as promoted by the Christian Bible. The researcher holds that with intentional formation, there would be reduction in cybercrime.

Keywords: Cybercrime, dignity, labour, religion.

Introduction

For about a decade now, cyber crime has taken a centre stage among modern crimes committed by young people. The introduction and establishment of social media has not only brought good tidings in area of communication, trade, ease of organizational search and training and the likes but it has on a negative part created another channel of crime. This has been growing in alarming rate as it has become almost a daily occurrence especially in Nigeria that people are duped or deceived and defrauded of their resources. This is done locally and internationally. This not only comes with great shocks among the victims but has so far widened the horizon of mistrust among members of the society.

The continued unemployment existing in Nigeria no doubt is a factor in this heinous crime. However, it is becoming glaring that many young people currently see this means as lucrative not minding the morality of such means of getting rich. Young people ranging from age 15 to those who are about 40 years are the ones in this crime. This has with time grown to the level of having groups with a ‘chairman’ who trains and control others in the

act of stealing from people through social media. Many young people of secondary (high) school age have left schools and ventured into this crime in the recent times. Some young persons have also abandoned their apprenticeship and joined cybercrime. The researcher's observations and discussions with some young persons who were into this crime show that most of them lack proper formation and guidance and hence they are carried away by the idea of getting rich quick. This is a situation that calls for action from all facets of the society. This has risen to cybercrimes. ik-Iloanusi and Ugochukwu (2023) among other crimes observe that cybercrimes are committed by literates. In this regard, those who are involved in the crimes are not illiterates, they have certain level of formal training. For them, the practice undermines a social system.

In the era when it seems that many young people neglect hard work and have embraced fraud, it becomes imperative to give thoughts to the direction of dignity of labour. Recently, it has been on the news and the researcher has witnessed also how people are being defrauded by these young people. Social media equally has been exposing some of these heinous actions of young people and in some cases, one sees that some of them act abnormally in the process. The researcher has also encountered few young persons who are into this crime and from the encounter, one finds out that the zeal for hard work is played down why the idea of getting rich quick is the order of the day among the young people.

As Ojedokun and Ilori (2021) rightly hold,

The online criminal activities of Yahoo-boys are not only negatively impacting Nigeria in multiple ways, they also constitute serious socio-economic threats to other Internet users worldwide. For this reason, it is expedient to suggest some useful strategies that can be adopted. (p. 20).

It is against the above suggestion that this work therefore echoes on the need to re-emphasize the principle of hard work among the contemporary young people of Nigeria. Going through Biblical positions on fraud and Paul's exhortation on dignity of labour, this work is aimed at promoting the spirit of hard work by all. This is to be done from the family which is the first agent of socialization and then to other spheres such as school, religious organizations, mass media and so on.

Definition of Terms

Dignity: Dignity here is used to denote respect or reverence. It is the idea and act of giving a particular thing due respect in such a way that it is considered worthwhile.

Labour: Labour is used here to mean work, job or occupation through which one earns a living. It has to do with any lawful human efforts put in place in order to earn a living, enhance economic development and general development.

Dignity of Labour: From the understanding of dignity and labour above, dignity of labour implies respect for all kinds of legitimate work. In other words, it is seeing every lawful work as worthwhile which man should respectfully accept to do for self reliance as well as contribution to the general development of the entire polity. Again, dignity of labour implies that no work done by human person should be neglected or relegated as of less importance or value and that as the work deserves respect so the worker deserves respect too.

Cybercrime: Cybercrime is criminal activities carried out using computer or internet. However, this work is concerned with what is referred to as Yahoo in Nigeria which is the use of computer, internet network as well as social media to defraud individuals from various parts of the world. This has given rise to what is popularly known as Yahoo-Boys in Nigeria who specialize in carrying out online frauds at varied degrees and strategies.

Reasons for Cyber Crimes among Nigerian Youths

Cyber crimes are evident among Nigerian youths. It has been a fact that at various times, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria has paraded a number of youths alleged to be involved in cybercrimes. The involvement in cybercrimes by youths has some influencing factors. Oyenuga (2019) in his research on factors influencing cybercrime involvement mentions that access to the internet as well as peer influence is a factor in this regard. Also, there are economic, social and psychological factors influencing involvement in cybercrime. It is pertinent to note that access to internet has increased rapidly in Nigeria and hence the observation of such as a factor. This does not rule out other factors which the author equally mentioned.

Furthermore, working on social causes of cyber crimes in Nigeria, unemployment among the youths has been fingered as one of the major reasons. Izuegbu (2012) rightly observes that the level of unemployment among Nigerian youths including graduates is alarming. This would have prompted Oguejiofor (2012) to observe that

The average Nigerian youth is living in a country that gives him little or no opportunities to make good, to live dignified like (sic) and exercise his God given abilities. Unemployment rate cannot even be ascertained since there is no instance in our public service that documents those that have not been employed. It is only through personal contacts that we can begin to imagine how alarming the rate of unemployment is in the country. In some parts of the country, you can easily get ten thousand applicants when you advertise for 10 jobs. (p. 372).

This observation has remained rife in Nigeria till present and hence young people engage in various crimes to succeed. A country where people have less means of livelihood is likely to face certain challenges including cyber crimes. Abdullahi (2012) mentions that “many

youths are walking on the streets without job,” (p. 37). This sorry state of things has led many youths into cyber crime popularly known as yahoo. Yusuf and Yahaya (n. d) observe equally the link between unemployment and cyber crimes in Nigeria. According to them “Cybercrime can be associated with high rate of unemployment, harsh economic conditions, and poor educational system. ... a lot of youths are not employed” (p. 170).

By foregoing, one can easily deduce that as unemployment continues, poverty is inevitable. By implication, youths engage in cybercrime due to poverty in the land. Izuegbu (2015) mentions that “the number of citizens living below poverty level is on increase as the population of the state continues to increase on alarming crescendo” (p. 132). This truism has generated various crises in the country. This has been attributed to years of mal-leadership. Ogbeidi (2012) bluntly states that

Without doubt, the unpardonable failure of the political leadership class managing the affairs and wealth of the country had inevitably brought severe misery to many voiceless and helpless Nigerians. It must also be mentioned here that Nigeria’s post-independence political bureaucratic and military elites had terribly pillaged the nation’s common wealth and national patrimony with impunity, thereby denying Nigerians to economic prosperity and quality living condition. (p. 18).

Many young people who feel frustrated find their ways into cybercrime to get ends meet. It is a sorry state and many young people who may not continue to wait venture into heinous crimes thereby bringing bad image to themselves and the nation at large.

Again, peer pressure is another factor igniting cybercrime in Nigeria. Some persons become fraudsters due to the friends they keep. When one sees his age mates lavishing money, he may be dragged like gnat to the evil. Most of the people who are into this crime were lured by their friends and like that, the practice has continued. Ojedokun and Ilori (2021) observe the influence of peer pressure when they assert that wealthy yahoo-boys who became wealthy through fraud were being imitated by their peers who saw them as role models.

The society at large is equally guilty. The Nigerian society is where only the affluent are given honour. A society where wrong values are placed above positive values is problematic. In various communities, no one cares how one makes his money. Discussing on social justice and poverty in Nigerian society, Anioke (2021) observes that

In our contemporary society, it seems that human beings are graded according to what they can produce, their social status, economic positions, contributions to the society, their political affiliations.... In Nigeria, this situation is manifested in all sectors of life. The gap between the rich and the poor increases on daily basis. The poor is denied justice that is due to him or her. (p. 2).

Very glaring is that those who have ill-gotten wealth are highly honoured while those who have honest means of livelihood but may not easily throw money around are cajoled. This practice directly and indirectly makes some young people to think on doing anything to 'belong'. This is a clear wrong values system bedeviling the Nigerian society.

Poor orientation is another key factor leading to cybercrime. Many young people have very wrong orientation even from their homes. The idea of hard work is getting low as everyone wants to "make it big" with or without working hard. Laziness and looking down on certain honest work are now staring at the society. Many young people now find it disgusting to engage in certain works. Instead of engaging in such work, they prefer the 'easy way'- cybercrime. This poor orientation is very central to the present research for the researcher believes that proper orientation could reduce the spate of cybercrime in Nigeria.

Practices Involved in Cyber Crimes

There are several cybercrimes but for the current research, focus is on what is popularly known as yahoo or HK in Nigeria. This is basically a fraudulent way of manipulating people using internet spaces to defraud them of their money. The term yahoo boys in Nigeria refers to financially motivated young Nigerians conducting phishing scams. In the early 2000, these boys started operations and today, both males and females are involved in the scam with new methods. Ogoo (2024) historically states that what was initially an advance-fee frauds which were popularly referred to as 419 has with time metamorphosed into yahoo. With the advancement in technology, 'yahoo boys' advance too. Social media emerged as a new avenue for the boys to explore to gain money using varied strategies. Ogoo observes that "With the advent of social media platforms, they found new avenues to exploit. The shift from email-based fraud to social media allowed these cybercriminals to reach a broader audience, increasing their potential victim pool" (n. p).

In operation, these cybercriminals with wider coverage engage audience from different parts of the world. Some of them, though males, disguise as females on social media looking for male victims. With some gullible men, they engage in intimate discussions on sexual issues anchored on relationship matters. With tricks, the victim may build trust and then engage in financial transactions. In most cases, once financial transactions take place, the channel of communication is closed. On the other hand, Ogoo (2024) mentions about sextortion. This is where the fraudsters engage their victims on sexual discussions. This according to Ogoo happens most to prominent persons who share their activities online such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Wizz as well as dating sites. They search for vulnerable individuals and engage them on sexual talks. According to Ogoo

Once a target is identified, the grooming process begins. The cybercriminals create fake profile, often posing as attractive individuals, to initiate contact. They engage the victim in seemingly genuine conversations, building rapport and establishing a sense of trust. Over time, the interactions become more intimate, and the 'Yahoo Boys' persuade their victims to share explicit photos or videos. (n. p).

This strategy has made it possible that many victims pay heavily to avoid leaking the photos or videos or conversations to the public. By holding such classified information, the victim is left with no option than to pay to save his or her image especially as a public person.

Currently, some yahoo-boys make use of language translators to chat people from various parts of the world. One is easily deceived as they mention that they were in countries where in actual sense they are in Nigeria. The sophisticated means through which the cybercriminals carry out their nefarious activities is beyond easy comprehension. All they do in the process is deceit so as to convince the victim until fund is transacted. The transaction equally follows a sophisticated means in such a way that it is hardly traced. In some cases, the transactions are done using crypto currency which involves both parties creating crypto wallet for the transactions or wired. Today, it is obvious that there are lots of fake crypto accounts designed for defrauding victims all over the world.

Today in Nigeria, young people are being recruited secretly from various communities to learn cybercrime. Some of these people are deceived while most of them are aware of what they were going for. Discussing with an escaping boy, he explains that he was not aware as the person who took him from his town told him they were to be selling clothes. He enumerated his ordeals which included poor feeding and always being awake. This situation has made it possible that many young people are today trapped into the slavery of yahoo-crime. Again, the issue of carrying out rituals among these people has been on public domain. According to a yahoo-boy interviewed

I do not have anything again. Last time, we went to a native doctor who said I have to pay three hundred thousand naira. But it is not just that money, I needed to buy a ram, fowl, yam, kolanut and other things. My friend did but I could not. I am right now broke.

The above statement came from a sixteen-year-old boy who joined through his brother while he was in SS2. With the above statements, it shows that some equally engage in rituals so as to continue in the illegal and obnoxious practice of yahoo. This equally was mentioned by the first person interviewed who mentioned that he was told to go and meet a native doctor to enable him start 'picking'.

Biblical Passages against Fraud

It becomes imperative in this research to examine parts of the scriptures that talked on issues of fraud. This is important to rightly equip those involved in education of the child from religious perspective to be aware of the demands. As a study aimed at discouraging fraud from Christian perspective, there is need to make emphasis on what the Scriptures say about financial fraudsters which has become the order of the day among many Nigerian youths.

The Scripture condemns entirely financial fraud. In Jeremiah 17:11, “The person who gets money dishonestly is like a bird that hatches eggs it did not lay. In the prime of life, he will lose his riches, and in the end, he is nothing but a fool”. This striking verse is an indication that the Bible is seriously against anything financial fraud. Not only that the Bible emphasizes the evil of fraud but also the consequences following the evil. In Proverbs 20:17 “What you get by dishonesty you may enjoy like the finest fruit but sooner or later, it will be like a mouthful of sand”. Dishonest means of getting money remains totally condemned by the Christian Bible and this is part of what formators of young people in contemporary Nigeria are expected to know so as to form young people properly. Further still, in Proverbs 10:2 “Wealth that you get by dishonesty will do you no good but honesty can save your life”. In Proverbs 16:8 “It is better to have a little honestly earned than to have a large income dishonestly gained”. The verses referenced here continue to promote honest means of getting rich against any form of dishonesty in getting rich. Most of the people who engage in cyber crime in Nigeria in order to defraud people ought to be aware of the position of the scriptures towards what they do. In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he laid emphasis that those who want to get rich soon, do all manner of evil and they are caught in the trap many foolish and harmful desires which eventually ruin them. These expositions could be linked to the warning in the Decalogue of Exodus 20:15 of “you shall not steal”. Of course, cybercrime of defrauding people of their wealth by any means is part of stealing and condemnable.

Emphasis on Dignity of Labour

Dignity of labour as earlier mentioned is the respect for all manner of lawful works that would enable one earn a living. Whether public service, businesses as well as various handiworks, these are all legitimate and could enable one earn a living. Trying to look down on or disparage a type of work is totally wrong. Any work of human hands devoid of illegitimate practices requires to be honoured. What happens in the Nigerian society today is that many young people disdain various works. Discussing with a young boy of sixteen years, the researcher was shocked to hear that he does not think that he would be able to descend low to start learning a handiwork. Though, not too sound academically, but having been exposed to internet fraud, he believes that other kind of work is not for his ‘class’. This idea is now seen among many young people. In the Igbo area of Nigeria, one of the major ways of empowering young people is *igba boyi* (serving someone in business to be

settled after an agreed years). Today, observations show that many young people do not want to embark on such a sure means of empowerment any longer. They see it as wasting of time. In fact, through observation, it has been seen that some persons who started the apprenticeship later left to join their mates or friends in internet fraud. This becomes more worrisome.

Looking at work from religious point of view, Awoniyi (2013) describes God as not being idle. Referencing the six days creation, it becomes a clear indication that God approves of work for man. In an era when a good number of people have refused to engage in legitimate work, it becomes worrisome. Work as it is thriving economy of any nation. Admonishing the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonica 3, Paul was unequivocal in condemning idleness. It is wrong for people to depend on others for their daily bread. By implication, he who always defraud people as a means of earning his living has no work. Paul warned that whoever that does not work should not eat. This admonition is very strong that he mentions that people should avoid whoever that has refused to work. This emphasis on dignity of labour is not only beneficial to individuals but to a greater extent, the entire society. A country where her youths keep ignoring hard work and grabbing get-rich-quick mentality through fraud is doomed. Such a nation has a future that should be worried about. Every facet of the Nigerian nation is expected to echo and re-echo dignity of labour. Religious bodies/organizations, schools, various agencies, non-governmental organizations, communities, media houses and so on are expected to lay emphasis on the dignity of labour to arrest the situation. The society should not wittingly or unwittingly degrade certain works for such is capable of discouraging young people into such work. The society should equally be mindful of the attention they bestow on those whose means of livelihood are not clear and yet they are affluent members of the society. Such incidence contributes to why young people rush into getting money by any means.

Religious Studies Teacher in Fighting Cyber Crime

Religion is a practice and at the same time a course of study in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in various countries. Nigeria as a country has religious studies in her curriculum of studies. Though, the study in primary and secondary schools take the form of either Christian Religious Studies or Islamic Religious Studies while in the higher institutions, it is usually a conglomerate of various religious beliefs. Whichever way, religion has a way of forming individuals and controlling certain excesses of humans. At the heart of religious studies is the teacher who prepares the scheme of work and prepares lesson delivery for the students. Religion as a formative course is therefore one of the courses that form human character and the teacher is at the centre of determining how effective such formation could be.

Using Christian Religious Studies as example, a teacher of religious studies is expected to be a person with contemporary knowledge of the trends among young people and the possibility of using the course as a corrective and formative measure. He is not expected to just know how to recite verses of the Bible but must be equipped with the applicability of such in daily human life. This is why Obiefuna, Izuegbu and Abalogu (2021) argue that if the effect of religion has nothing to do with human life both social and spiritual, then such religion is not acceptable. It then behooves on the teacher to be able to relate the scriptures with the current situations around his students- in this case, cyber crime. This work has made some references to Biblical positions on financial fraud or crime. Such verses are expected to be part of the areas a teacher should teach the students owing to the malady called cyber crime in the contemporary society. This is to be done intentionally with proactive promotion of dignity of labour through projects as well as insistence on learning of skills by the students. The teacher therefore is expected to be a harbinger of sound knowledge of the scriptures and the applicability in the contemporary lives of his students.

The teacher at the secondary level is expected to engage in both group and individual counseling of the students. With his sound knowledge in contemporary trends, he should be able to listen to the students and then offer them workable advice aimed at promoting hard work among them and making sure that the idea of get-rich-quick syndrome is brought to lowest ebb. He is to understand that at secondary level, the students are at their formative stage. Being a person who contributes in conscience development of the child, he has to be visibly involved in the process using the scriptures and life experiences to form the students. It is important to note that humans take things seriously when they are balanced with scriptural and life experiences.

At tertiary institution level, the teacher has work to do. At this stage, some students who may not have the opportunity of being properly formed at secondary school stage may likely fall prey to the perpetrators of cyber crime. The teacher is expected to continue educating the students on the dangers of ill-gotten wealth and the importance of hard work. Efforts should be made to link religion with creativity. The scriptural mandate of “be fruitful, multiply and subdue” of Genesis 1 should be made known to the students. When such is well interpreted, it is capable of igniting in students the power of positive creativity which would in turn bring in dignity of labour. The teacher at this level should not make mistake of believing that the students are of age. Most of the students are still in need of directing. As a person who is expected to know more, the teacher is to guide the students and with concerted and intentional efforts, their minds are well channeled. When minds are well channeled, positive thinking comes and value of work is experienced.

Conclusion

The issue of cyber or internet crime or scam is a reality in the contemporary Nigeria. Many have been caught in the web and many are still on the route. Many have fallen victims of the issue and many are still going to fall victims. In all these, one thing clear is that it is an era when young people ignore hard work and embrace 'quick money'. The society itself by certain actions applauds such misdemeanor by allowing much recognition for individuals that have benefited from the crime. The Bible unequivocally condemns fraudulent means of getting money which many young people today engage in. Many awful practices go on in the process and the problem is fast eating deep. The teacher who is the builder of human has serious contributions to make. In particular, a religious studies teacher is expected to use his knowledge of the scriptures and his experience in the contemporary society to form and reform the students. Education is a major means of social change. Be that as it may, this work acknowledging that the issue at hand requires concerted effort, however, the teacher of religious studies has more to do in his interactions with the students for man is a religious being who most times does things with conviction that it is approved or disapproved by the Divine.

Recommendations

In order to make this feasible, the government at all levels should endeavour to create employment opportunities by investing in critical economic sectors which would help in mitigating the continued unemployment in Nigeria. Where the young people have no hope of getting gainful employment after studies, the efforts of a religious studies teacher may not yield needed results.

Secondly, the society should value hard work by appreciating people who made their wealth through genuine means and play down those whose ways of making wealth are not well known. By so doing, value of hard work is ignited and such corroborates the teacher's formation efforts for the benefits of the society.

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