

**EXEGETICAL STUDY OF MICAH 3:5-12 AND THE CHALLENGE OF
MATERIAL PURSUIT IN
RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study addresses the problem of material pursuit in religious leadership profession in Nigeria in the light of Micah 3:5-12. In this Old Testament text, prophet Micah criticizes oppressive exploitation of the people by their own leaders. The leaders comprise people in religious and political leadership cadres. They use their position to get quick wealth through the exploitation of the people. Prophet Micah condemns a social environment in which leadership is no longer for the upliftment of the people but for their destruction, as leaders prey on their people. The issues in Micah's time reflect the prevailing situation in Africa, and particularly Nigeria to the extent that its text needs and demands contextual discourse for urgent purposeful reversal of leadership oppression and exploitation in contemporary religious roles. While many Nigerian political leaders have always been criticized for their anti-people policies, it is a fact today that many religious leaders are not in any way different. Many use their positions to get as much as they can from the people who are systematically brutalized and impoverished. The present discussion focuses more on the religious leaders, especially the Christian prophets, priests and pastors, who are entrusted with the spiritual and moral well being of the people. The study adopts exegetical method of biblical interpretation which analyzes interesting terms and issues in Micah 3:5-12 for theologizing as one examines the intercultural implication of the text on exploitation and oppression in Nigerian religious leadership business.

Keywords: Micah 3:5-12, exegesis, material pursuit, religious leadership, Nigeria

Introduction

Micah 3:5-12 criticizes oppressive exploitation of the people by their own leaders. The leaders comprise both religious and political leaders. Each of the leaders uses his or her leadership position to get quick wealth through the exploitation of the people. This particular point makes this text of Micah very topical. Prophet Micah condemns a social environment in which leadership is no longer for service to the people but for their destruction, as leaders prey on their people. The theme of justice is central in the whole book of Micah, and this is most expressed in Micah 3:5-12 (Alfaro, 2017). The political

and religious leaders are chided for perverting the principles of justice in their dealings with the people. In a situation where every institution is accused of injustice, the people have nowhere to run to in the face of oppression and deprivation of rights. Such a society easily recedes into a state of anarchy or a jungle with the consequent brutish use of force. The intervention of Micah is a way of showing that God has his own way of coming to the defense of the oppressed in an unjust and apparently hopeless situation.

In Micah, justice is rated first among the most important things that Yahweh demands of his people: “He has told you, O human (אָדָם), what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice (מִשְׁפָּט), to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8).⁵ Commenting on this text in a recent study, Nwaoru (2012) shows how it highlights the fact that what pleases God is not the multiplication of empty offerings but the growth in ethical life and social justice. As can be seen, the text rates justice very high, and by this it is expected that the people’s leaders should be the champions of justice (3:1). Instead, they are the ones who oppress the people through religious manipulation, exploitation and other forms of social injustice (3:5-12). The religious institution, thus, becomes a rogue institution, robbing the people under the pretext of procuring divine blessings.

The issues in Micah 3:5-12 reflect the prevailing situation in Nigeria. While most Nigerian political leaders have always been criticized for their anti-people policies, it is a fact today that many religious leaders are not in any way different (Achebe, 1984; Okere, 2013). Many contemporary religious leaders use their positions to get as much as they can from the people who are systematically brutalized and impoverished (Adesina, 2016). The text of Micah 3 attacks all cadres of leaders in the society, but the present discussion focuses more on the religious leaders, especially the Christian prophets, priests and pastors, who are entrusted with the spiritual and moral wellbeing of the people. The study will focus particularly on the two oracles in verses 5-12 which deal directly with the extortion in the religious context. However, some elements in the first oracle in verses 1-4 will still feature in the discussion.

Hebrew Text of Micah 3:5-12 (BHS Hebrew Old Testament, 4th edition)

- ⁵ כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּבִיאִים הַמְתַעֲבִים אֶת-עַמִּי הַנְּשָׁכִים בְּשִׁנְיָהֶם וְקָרְאוּ שְׁלוֹם וְאָשְׁרָ לֹא-יִתֵּן
עַל-פִּיהֶם וְקָדְשׁוֹ עָלָיו מִלְחָמָה:
- ⁶ לָכֵן לִיָּלֵךְ לָכֶם מַחְזוֹן וְחִשְׁבָה לָכֶם מִקְסֹם וּבִאָה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עַל-הַנְּבִיאִים וְקָדַר עָלֵיהֶם הַיּוֹם:
⁷ וּבִשׁוֹ הַחֲזִיזִים וְחִפְרוּ הַקְּסָמִים וְעָטוּ עַל-שִׁפְפָם כִּי אֵין מַעֲנָה אֱלֹהִים:
- ⁸ וְאוֹלָם אֲנֹכִי מְלֹאטִי כֹחַ אֶת-רוּחַ יְהוָה וּמִשְׁפָּט וּגְבוּרָה לְהַגִּיד לְיַעֲקֹב פְּשָׁעוֹ וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל:
⁹ שִׁמְעוּ-נָא זֹאת רְאשֵׁי בַיִת יַעֲקֹב וּקְצִינֵי בַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמְתַעֲבָבִים מִשְׁפָּט פְּלִי-הַיְשָׁרָה יַעֲקֹבוֹ:
¹⁰ בְּנֵה צִיּוֹן בְּדָמִים וִירוּשָׁלַם בְּעוֹלָה:
- ¹¹ רְאשֵׁיָהּ בְּשִׁחַד יִשְׁפָטוּ בַמַּמְחִיר יוֹרוּ וּנְבִיאֶיהָ בְּכֶסֶף יִקְסֹמוּ וְעַל-יְהוָה יִשְׁעֲנוּ לֵאמֹר הֲלוֹא
¹² לָכֵן בִּגְלַלְכֶם צִיּוֹן שִׁדָּה תִחַרַשׁ וִירוּשָׁלַם עֵינֵי תִהְיֶה וְהָרַ הַבַּיִת לְכַמּוֹת יַעֲרֹ:
יְהוָה בְּקָרְבָנוּ לֹא-תָבוֹא עָלֵינוּ רָעָה:

English Translation of Micah 3:5-12

⁵Thus says the Lord regarding the prophets who lead my people astray; who, when they have something to bite with their teeth, announce peace, but who, when one does not put something in their mouth, consecrate war against him. ⁶Therefore you will have night rather than vision, and it will be too dark for you to make divination. The sun will go down on the prophets, and the day will become dark over them. ⁷The seers will be ashamed and the diviners will be embarrassed. Indeed, they will all cover their mouths because there is no answer from God. ⁸On the other hand I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord and with judgment and courage to make known to Jacob his rebellious act and to Israel his sin. ⁹Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and twist everything that is straight, ¹⁰who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with violent injustice. ¹¹Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord saying, “Is not the Lord in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us.” ¹²Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field. Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple will become a forest for high places. (The above English text is the researcher’s translation from the Hebrew text)

Exegesis of Micah 3:5-12

The text of 3:5-12 is structured in form of a juridical proceeding, comprising of accusation (v. 5) and judgment (vv. 6-8) against the prophets in the first oracle, and accusation (vv. 9-11) and judgment (v. 12) against both political and religious leaders in the second oracle (Soggin, 1989; Mathis, 2003). The following characters can be identified in the text of Micah 3:5-12: Yahweh, the prophet (Micah), the religious leaders (prophets and priests), the political leaders (heads, rulers, judges), and the people. The text distinguishes between the words of the Prophet Micah as a person and the words of the oracle from Yahweh. This makes it possible to identify Yahweh’s viewpoint and the prophet’s viewpoint even though both resemble. The religious and political leaders are passive characters and are presented as the oppressors and culprits. The people are also passive characters and are presented as victims of the oppression, avarice and exploitative tendencies of their political and religious leaders.

v. 5: Accusation against the Prophets

In Micah 3:5, Micah launches a heavily worded accusation against the prophets:

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה עַל־הַנְּבִיאִים הַמְתַּעֲבִים אֶת־עַמִּי הַנֹּשְׁכִים בְּשִׁנֵּיהֶם וְקָרְאוּ שְׁלוֹם וְאָשַׁר
לֹא־יִתֵּן עַל־פִּיהֶם וְקִדְּשׁוּ עֲלֵיו מִלְחָמָה:

“Thus says the Lord regarding the prophets who lead my people astray; who, when they have something to bite with their teeth, announce peace, but who, when one does not put something in their mouth, consecrate war against him”. All those classified as prophets in this text are most probably those genuinely called to be Yahweh’s prophets or mouthpieces, as there is no indication that they are impostors. Micah is not accusing these prophets of not having been sent by God; he does not deny to them divinely inspired communications. What he attacks is corruption of these communications for their own

ends (Thomas, 1992; Yilpet, 2006). They are supposed to be true prophets of Yahweh, but they abuse their offices. Instead of being concerned with communicating the will of God, their primary concern is their mouths (פִּיָּהֶם).

The great accusation against the prophets is that they mislead ‘my people’ (עַמִּי), that is, God’s own people. They are pejoratively qualified as אֲנֹתָתֵי עַמִּי הַפְּתִימִים הַנְּבִיאִים (the prophets who mislead my people). The form אֲנֹתָתֵי (who mislead) is Hiphil participle masculine plural of the root נָתַתְּ. In the Hiphil, it has the moral sense of causing someone to err. The prophets are supposed to guide the people on the right path but instead they lead them into error. The phrase עַמִּי (my people) is used rhetorically to intensify the gravity of the offence. It is employed to stress the point that these prophets are not just maltreating the people but they are recklessly misleading Yahweh’s own people, the very people for whom they are chosen as prophets. In a society where the people depend solely on the prophetic word to know the will of God, the abuse of office by the prophet makes it difficult for the people to know the divine will, hence they easily stray.

The text is full of imagery. The flagrant perversion of prophetic ministry is expressed with a paradox. The prophet’s mouth, which is supposed to be the instrument of the divine word, thirsts no longer for the word from God but for something to bite from the people. The two words, ‘teeth’ and ‘mouth’, are employed to portray the grasping nature of these prophets. The mouth organ, which is the greatest weapon of the prophetic ministry, is abused and diverted only to the biting of offerings extorted from the people. The consequence is that oracles of blessing are given only to those who bring gifts to the prophet. They declare peace for those who bring gifts and consecrate war against one who has nothing to give. The two primary words here are שָׁלוֹם (peace) and מִלְחָמָה (war). Prophet Micah puts it ironically by using the strange expression מִלְחָמָה קִדְּשׁוּ (consecrate war) to highlight the perversion of issues by these prophets. The worst of it is that if one does not bring a gift, an oracle of woe is pronounced against him or her. This blatant perversion of divine blessing makes nonsense of the whole prophetic ministry.

vv. 6-8: Judgment of the Prophets

Micah 3:6-8 contains judgment oracle. The judgment oracle pronounces doom as punishment for the erring prophets but reward for the faithful prophet Micah himself. The punishment is in accordance with the nature of their crime. This is presented in v. 6 in a well-crafted chiasmic word order with images of darkness and light. They will have night (לֵילָה) instead of vision (חֹזֶן), and it will be too dark (הַשְׁכָּה) for them to make divination (קִסָּם). Micah uses the term קִסָּם (divination) only in this context (3:6, 7, 11), and he understands it as a mantic activity that involves ‘seeing’ or ‘perceiving’. It is taken for granted in this text that visions and divinations are normal means of prophetic activity.

Wilson (1980) argues that the title חֹזֶן (visionary) is characteristic of Judean prophetic tradition, pointing out that the visionary is one who obtained revelations through visions. According to him, the visionary used divination (קִסָּם) to obtain his oracles and this was seen as a normal form of prophetic activity in Judah. The whole activity requires light, and from this perspective one appreciates that nature of the

punishment for these prophets. According to Simundson (1994), not only does Micah speak out against these prophets, but he also declares punishment. Since they have distorted the instrument of the prophetic office, their punishment, which comes in form of retributive justice, consists in blocking all the avenues for the reception of divine communication. Instead of the normal illumination for divination, darkness will overshadow them as the light of the sun will elude them. So they will not be able to see visions. In v. 7, another form of reversal is presented in the fact that instead of having their mouths filled with divine messages, they will have closed lips because God will no longer disclose his will to them.

On the other hand, v. 8 presents the faithful prophet, Micah, as one who remains filled with power (כֹּחַ), Yahweh's spirit (רוּחַ יְהוָה), judgment (מִשְׁפָּט) and courage (גְּבוּרָה). These are the great prophetic qualities that these other prophets seem to have compromised because of their abuse of the prophetic office. The most important of all these is the רוּחַ יְהוָה (Yahweh's spirit) which is the source of the other qualities. Because Micah possesses Yahweh's spirit, he is able to carry out the distinctive prophetic duty which he puts simply as "to make known to Jacob his rebellious act and to Israel his sin" (v. 8). In this verse, Micah clearly contrasts himself with the so-called religious leaders in the society. The other prophets were so compromised that they lacked courage to condemn transgression and sin. Waltke (2007) acknowledges that there are difficulties with the grammar of this verse, but he is of the view that the accusative כֹּחַ (power), complements the verb מָלֵא (Qal - filled). This verb on its part is again connected with the word combination רוּחַ יְהוָה (Spirit of God). It is an interesting phenomenon that power is associated with the performance of a prophet. It is, however, not strange for prophets to be associated with the רוּחַ יְהוָה (cf. 1 Sam. 10:6; 1Kgs 18:12; 22:21f; 2Kgs 2:9, 16; Isa. 61:10).

vv. 9-11 Accusation of Political and Religious Leaders

This third oracle brings together and elaborates the accusations of the first two oracles in vv. 1-4 and vv. 5-8. The political and religious leaders are generally identified in v. 9 as "the heads" (רִאשִׁים) of the house of Jacob and rulers (קְצִינִים) of the house of Israel". The first word רִאשִׁים (heads) can refer to all kinds of leaders (family, tribe, religious, military, political) but the second term קְצִינִים (chiefs, rulers) is a military terminology and refers to leaders as military commanders or military administrators. All Israel's leaders are included in these two classes and they are all accused in strong terms of abhorring justice (מִשְׁפָּט) and twisting everything that is straight (פְּלִי־הַיְשָׁרָה). The situation is so bad that all leaders of the society are brought up for indictment; the ruler, the head, the priest and the prophet (v. 11).

Every one of these leaders is found wanting as each does what is opposed to the proper office. The rulers hate justice and shed blood, the heads take bribes in judgment, the priests commercialize their ministry and the prophets divine only for money. In this way Micah explains how each class of leaders has its own specific ways of transgressing the ethical principles. The great accusation against the leaders is that of the abhorring and

perversion of justice (מִשְׁפָּט). The Hebrew word מִשְׁפָּט denotes a number of activities all geared towards the establishment and maintenance of order in the society and, thus, it can refer to divine laws or instructions and various kinds of juridical processes. According to Deuteronomy 1:15-17, the very office of רֹאשֵׁי הָעָם (heads, rulers) was established by Moses for the purpose of maintaining justice and equity in the Israelite covenant community. The point here is that these heads of different communities, usually regarded as elders, function as the judges of their communities. Thus if the leaders now abhor justice and equity, as Micah accuses them, it means that they are negating the very reason for which their offices exist and undermining the very principles on which the covenant community is founded.

The oracle also accuses the leaders in v. 10 of building Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with wickedness. This recalls the accusation against them in the first oracle where the language is couched in the cannibalistic imagery of eating the people: “You who hate good and love evil, who tear off their skin from them and their flesh from their bones, who eat the flesh of my people, strip off their skin from them, break their bones and chop them up as for the pot and as meat in a kettle” (vv. 2-3). The leaders are so ruthless that they not only eat the flesh of the people but also crush their bones. This needs not be understood in its literal rawness but means that the oppressive leadership is such that the people are left with nothing to hang on to. As Allen (1976) puts it, “The defenseless were skinned of property and money to swell the fortunes of those who should have been their protectors”. Micah laments a situation where the poor are made to contribute to the reckless opulence of their leaders, the consequence being that the leaders grow richer just as their people grow poorer. One form of this opulence is expressed in the mighty buildings that adorned Zion and Jerusalem. These structures were erected with ill-gotten money as extortion and bribery were the order of the day. The political leaders are, thus, guilty of corruption and bloodshed, as the poor is exploited to death.

The religious leaders are grouped under the two classes of priests and prophets. The crimes of these two groups, as mentioned in v. 11, are similar, namely, the commercialization of their ministry. One of the priest’s primary functions is to instruct (הִלֵּךְ) the people, which is the same as teaching the will of God called Torah. Micah accuses the priests of leaching with a price (מְהָרָה). The word מְהָרָה is used 15 times in the Hebrew Bible, and it has the sense of ‘hire, price, reward or payment’. People usually brought offerings to priests for their ministrations, but this is not necessarily seen as prices for those services. In Isa 55:1, the spiritual nourishment that God gives is to be received without a מְהָרָה (cost, payment). What Micah condemns in the priests is not that they receive gifts but that they now insist on payment for their teaching. In other words, they now dispense the free divine nourishment in exchange for monetary or material reward. The crime of the prophets is of the same nature. Producing the answer of God upon receipt of money, according to Mathis (2003), the priests and prophets sold the grace of the Lord for a covetous price.

The corruption of the whole system, both political and religious, is carried out without qualms by those concerned. The text thus laments that they do all these and still nurse the fantasy of continuing to have Yahweh as their protector.

v. 12: Judgment of Political and Religious Leaders

The judgment oracle pronounces a punishment that accords with the accusation. Because the city is built through injustice and the oppression of the poor masses, the prophet announces that “Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple will become a forest for high places”

לְכֹן בְּגַלְלֵכֶם צִיּוֹן שָׂדֵה תִּחְרַשׁ וִירוּשָׁלַיִם עֵינֵי תִהְיֶה וְהָר הַבַּיִת לְכַמּוֹת יֵעָר:

This same prophecy is reported by the elders during the trial of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 26:18, showing how famous the prediction became. What this prophecy means in effect is that the two symbols of Yahweh’s presence, the city and the temple, will be destroyed, implying that Yahweh will depart from Jerusalem. The political leaders will no longer have a seat of governance and the religious leaders will have no cultic centre from where to ply their trade. This final punishment of Jerusalem, the capital city, accords with the logic of Micah’s whole prophecy that identifies the two capital cities, Samaria and Jerusalem, as the main troubles with Israel and Judah. As he puts it, “What is the crime of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the sin of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?” (Mic 1:5). For Micah, then, the destruction of these two centres of crime becomes a triumph of divine justice.

Micah 3:5-12 and Material Pursuit by Religious Leaders in Nigeria

The very practices that the prophet critiques in Micah 3:5-12 resonate in many ways in the practices of the contemporary religious leaders in Nigeria. Many aberrations in the contemporary religious practices reflect the very issues that Micah condemns. Such aberrations are as follows: Abuse of leadership position, commercialization of religious ministry, misleading interpretation of biblical text for material gain, forced donations, exploitation of peoples’ ignorance of faith.

The whole message of Micah 3 is anchored on the reckless abuse of leadership position by Israel’s political and religious leaders. Likewise, in contemporary Nigerian society, some leadership office meant for the maintenance of justice for all and welfare of the people is now turned into an instrument of oppression, disruption of the just order and selfish profiteering (Itebiye, 2016). In the religious ministry, the situation becomes chaotic as ministry that is supposed to have its orientation in God is now channeled towards the acquisition of material success and material wealth. In the process, the people who are to be protected are the ones that are exploited and brutalized. This kind of abuse of religious leadership position resonates in the present Nigerian society. Some pastors and prophets have become self-made pastors and prophets because of desire for material wealth (Agha, 2002). It is rampant in the Pentecostal and new religious movements many of which are rooted on quick acquisition of wealth. More worrisome, the same spirit is currently causing a lot of confusion in mainline Churches. According to Madueke (2008), “A priest or pastor will find pastoral ministry very cumbersome if he does not nurture a single and undivided heart for the kingdom of God, exemplified in a simple life-style” (p. 77). Often times, people do not seek genuine pastoral assistance from a minister unless he or she has the self-renunciation that breeds good character.

It is instructive how the text of Micah 3:5-12 condemns the religious leaders because of the way they attach monetary gain to their ministrations. The commercialization of religious ministry is a lamentable reality in the contemporary Nigerian society. It has reached alarming levels in the Nigerian society. In many contexts, blessings are graded according to the amount one brings. In a good number of cases, just as Micah condemns, ministers refuse to minister unless their pockets are filled. According to Agha (2002):

The Church... no longer play the prophetic role of condemning ill-gotten material wealth. Their leaders have become deeply involved in the acquisition of materialism. Some have single handedly built universities and schools. Some sing the praise of those who cheated to get into the office for material benefits. (pp. 19-20).

The problem in many parts of Nigeria is that there is little official arrangement for the adequate maintenance of religious leaders and workers. This makes them to depend entirely on the goodwill of the people. In some situations, missionary groups are constrained to turn their missionary work primarily as a means of making money. This comes in different guises. If one goes on mission mainly in order to raise funds and make money, even if for the most holy of projects, there is cause for grave concern (Onayikan, 2013). According to Agha (2002), "The desire for prosperity and material wealth has the most incentive for the proliferation of Churches in Nigeria" (p. 20). One has to acknowledge the fact that priests, pastors, prophets and other religious workers are entitled to adequate support for their ministry, but the ministry is never to be perceived as a business transaction.

The text of Micah 3:5 condemns the prophets who mislead God's people. The thirst for quick money has led many religious leaders to mislead the people in the interpretation of a number of biblical texts. The consequence is to attribute to God what God never said, Micah does not brand all the prophets and priests whose activities he condemns as impostors or false religious ministers. He recognizes their authenticity as leaders of Yahweh's people but castigates their exploitative tendencies and corruption of their sacred office. Sometimes people are deceived by the fact that a particular minister is very effective, hardworking and producing results. So they cue in to all his or her demands. This is a great danger. The euphoria of success often inclines one to keep milking the people dry knowing that everything one says is believed as coming from God.

The manipulation of Christian religion and the gospel for financial and other materialistic motives is one of the roots of evil in the contemporary Nigerian society. Some of the often manipulated and misinterpreted biblical passages are Malachi 3:10-12, Proverbs 11:24-31 and I Corinthians 9:6-7. Some Christian ministers hide under the canopy of religion when their primary concern is material and pecuniary interest. This situation has become so fertile in Nigeria that many pastors and ministers of the Churches preach prosperity as part of spiritual salvation. Also many ministers tend to emphasize materialism at the expense of spirituality. The practice of tithing is a commandment from God (Malachi 3:8-12). This practice has become more pronounced now because of the so

called prosperity ministries that are springing up in every nook and cranny of the contemporary society, with the intention to make money for their selfish gains (Ibenwa, 2002). It has been observed that this tithing is being abused, misinterpreted and misunderstood by some Churches. According to Nwadiolor and Umeanolue (2013), “Materialistic preaching with its unapologetic emphasis on the acquisition of wealth at all cost and shameful deceptions of the materialistic preachers with their open display of affluence have distorted the value systems of Christianity in Nigeria” (p. 30). In this guise, religion is no longer the moral cohesive force in our modern Nigerian society. Materialism has taken the upper hand. This is the current state of the abuse of religion.

The text of Micah 3 condemns the corrupt prophets who impose peace and divine blessings on those who give but declare war and divine curse on those who do not give. The great issue of controversy in the contemporary ecclesial life in Nigeria is the issue of tithing which demands that people give the one-tenth of their earnings to the religious minister or to the church as the case may be. It is no longer the issue of free will donation to sustain the Church's pastoral work; instead, people are constrained under pain of divine wrath to give of their earnings. All these are justified with quotations from one section of the Old Testament or another. The most prominent of these texts is that of Malachi 3:7-10 which has been systematically misinterpreted and applied out of context. People are threatened on the basis of this text, which has little to do with the Christian religion, that they are robbing God by not paying their tithes and so remain liable to God's judgment. It is horrifying how the antiquated Levitical practice of tithing in the Old Testament has been avariciously enthroned to displace the normal Christian practice of free-will donations.

But while generous donations are ever to be encouraged, the use of divine wrath to threaten those who are not disposed to giving destroys the very essence of free-giving mid religious freedom. The text 2 Corinthians 9:7 is very clear on this: “Each one should give as much as he has decided on his own initiative, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” The point of this text is that the donation to God should never be imposed or induced with any form of threat or psychological constraint. But many avaricious ministers abuse this text of Scripture by laying emphasis only on the last part: “... for God loves a cheerful giver.” With this truncated text, the impression is given that the more we give to God the more he gives to us and so one should give abundantly and with cheerfulness. The biblical idea of grace, which is a free gift, implies that God's gift is ever free and does not depend on the quantity of the human gifts. There is no doubt that God blesses the cheerful giver but the same God can also lavish his gifts on one who does not give. This is the mystery of God's grace.

The exploitation of the people by their religious leaders comes in different forms. In the text of Micah, the people are led astray because they truly believe that the prophets speak the truth from Yahweh. The unfortunate situation is that the prophets betray their office and betray the people's trust. In the Nigerian context, one notices an alarming mass ignorance of the main teachings of the Christian faith. Such ignorance sometimes is not lacking in some of the ministers. In many places the Christian teachings are based on the elementary Church teachings and doctrines originally prepared for

catechumens and children who are not deemed mature enough for solid food. When over ninety percent of what is done in Christian theology and biblical studies is not considered pastoral enough to be communicated to the people of God for fear of their not being able to understand or fear of disturbing their infantile faith, then something is seriously wrong with both the pastoral formation and the general orientation of Christian education. The people's ignorance, which accounts for their uncritical religiosity and credulousness, is grossly abused by the religious ministers. Some ministers are only content in feeding the people with the elementary lessons of the faith and doing nothing to correct their superstitious mindset. In fact, their deficient religious teachings often promote the superstitious outlook among the people.

One learns from the text of Micah 3 how calamity befalls the Israelite nation because of the nefarious activities of the political and religious leaders. This plays out in various ways in the contemporary setting. For instance, most of Nigeria's current political and developmental woes are blamed on her corrupt and inept political leadership. In more recent times, the religious leadership has come under similar bashing. The insatiable appetite of many pastors and religious ministers has contributed immensely to the moral decadence of the nation. Since fat monetary donations in the religious context, no matter how it is got, is a sure means to win social prestige, people now go through any foul means to make money, given the societal craze for honour and social recognition. The consequence is increase in crimes and all forms of social malaise.

The text of Micah shows the importance of true and courageous prophetic voice in Nigerian society mired in corruption. Micah, contrary to his prophetic colleagues denounces the evil in his society. He never allows personal advantage to take precedence over the demands of justice. The prophet, as a visionary and watchman, sees danger ahead and warns his contemporaries. In the contemporary society, prophetic voices are sometimes compromised for personal profit and craze for patronage from the very corrupt political leaders. This is reason why Yilpet (2006) says, "Those who proclaim God's word for personal profit or who proclaim a prosperity gospel are false prophets. They lack any sense of what is right because the Holy Spirit is not present in their ministry" (p. 1079). Ugwuweye (2014) sees false prophets as "mere charlatans who play on people's credulity and prophesy for bread and butter" (p. 153). The consequence is that people are not warned of the inevitable consequences of their actions thus leaving the society vulnerable to the looming dangers.

Conclusion

The exegetical study of Micah 3:5-12 in the context of material pursuit in leadership profession raises many interesting questions and points for reflection as one examines the contemporary approach to religious leadership in Nigeria. The essay has examined some of these points together with the challenges they pose. While many Nigerian political leaders have always been criticized for their oppressive policies and abuse of office, there are also religious leaders in Nigeria who are materialistic and exploitative. The study has

shown that the prevailing materialistic religious leadership in Nigeria is not in any way different from the corrupt leadership situation that characterized Micah's society. Nigerian nation needs religious leaders who can spearhead a moral and an ethical re-orientation for the nation and its people. The contemporary Christian prophets, priests and pastors need to be properly equipped intellectually, morally and spiritually to be able to address this corrupt material pursuit in religious leadership in Nigeria.

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