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ORIGINAL SIN, NIGERIA'S PROBLEM OF EVIL AND THE NEED FOR VIRTUE

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Abstract

Life in Nigeria is meant to be beautiful and to be enjoyed because of her resilient, diligent, and hardworking people, her natural resources, and her family culture. Nevertheless, it appears frustrating due to some evil. If Augustine were to be asked, he would attribute the problem of evil to the first fall and original sin. Although some may disagree with Augustine today, this paper argues that his arguments are sound and a good example of how faith and reason depend on each other to explain certain phenomena. It also argues that Augustine's thoughts explain the problem of evil in Nigeria but do not provide Nigerians an excuse for her many problems. To address her woes, Nigerians

Introduction

Life in Nigeria is meant to be beautiful and enjoyed because of her resilient, diligent, hardworking people, natural resources, and family culture. Nevertheless, it appears frustrating as "Nigeria happens" over and over again. It is said that "Nigeria happened to you," in popular social media culture when you are a victim of Nigeria's avoidable political or social recklessness. For example, the reported Lekki toll gate massacre on October 20, 2020 (Falana, 2021). Nigeria's woes appear to increase by the day, and being so blessed, one cannot help being embarrassed by the situations of dissension, poverty, insecurity, corruption and avoidable deaths that continue to rob the nation of joy (Fisher, 2014).

In an experience of such pain and disappointment, one is forced to ask the old but pertinent question: Why evil? Why is evil in the world? How did it get so bad that in Nigeria, despite her vast religious people, corruption persists? If Augustine of Hippo were to answer today, he would say that sin is the cause of evil, that it was by original sin that evil entered the world, and the Good God is not responsible. Our freewill is (Bonaiuti, 1917). Consequently, in this essay, the focus is the exposition of Original Sin and St. Augustine's defence of the doctrine. The key sources and justification of Augustine's thought used in this essay come from selected portions of Augustine's *City of God*, *the Confessions* and *De Libero Arbitrio*.

This paper argues that, although today, some may disagree with Augustine, his arguments are sound and a good example of how faith and reason depend on each other. It also argues that Augustine's thoughts explains the problem of Evil in Nigeria.

A Summary of Augustine of Hippo

The New Catholic Encyclopedia records that Aurelius Augustinus, popularly known as St. Augustine of Hippo, was a philosopher and theologian who lived in the fourth and fifth century. He was born in Teggaste, Numidia, a place in modern Algeria, on the 13th of November 354 AD. Augustine died on the 28th of August 430 AD in Hippo Regius, today's Annaba, Algeria. Despite the poor economic status of his parents, his devout Christian



Mother, Monica(331-387 AD) and pagan father Patricius, Augustine was lucky to have a good education in the towns of Teggaste, Madaura and Carthage).

In *the Confessions*, Augustine showed that It was while he stayed out of school for one year, and stole in the neighbourhood out of fun that it became clear to him some the compulsive nature of man that loves to do wrong (Cooper, 2012). This is what he will later use to justify the idea of Original Sin. Augustine became a young promising professor of Rhetoric at Milan, where he sat under the instructions of the Ambrose (340 – 397 AD) the bishop of Milan. It was here also that he doubted the answers of Manichaeism; began personal studies of Neoplatonism, scriptures and the life of St. Anthony of the desert (Ukwamedua, 2018).

Augustine's philosophical background, thus came, Platonism, Neoplatonism, Manichaeism and Christianity as taught by Anaximander, Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus and St. Ambrose of Milan. This largely reflects on his philosophy. The search for truth and answers led Augustine to become a Manichean.

Original Sin

Augustine (1958) describes original sin in two ways. First, as the sin of the first parents of humans. Second, as the guilt, state or situation of the human nature because of the first sin. The core of his conviction is based on the interpretation of St Paul's letter to the Romans 5:12 - 19. Bonaiuti(1917) has good reasons to say that Augustine's conclusions on the passage were not solely his own but greatly influenced by the interpretations of Ambrosarter.

Augustine argues that there was a first sin and all men inherit the guilt of that sin and are born into misery because of it (Augustine, 1961). Augustine highlights a creation in need of salvation because of this misery. The Christian baptism forgives this guilt and sets a path of liberation of human nature which had been tainted and cannot attain salvation on its own. Augustine argues for a new way to liberate one's self from evil through supernatural help unlike the gnostic approach of the Manichaeans. He also taught on how Original sin is communicated to progenies.

Augustine on Original Sin

For Augustine, Original sin is the cause of evil in the world. While a Manichaean, Augustine had embraced the explanation that reality consists of opposite forces and that explains the presence of good and evil in the world. However, He was not at home with the Manichean position that God (the Good Supreme Being) wrestles to subdue evil. To him that made the supreme not supreme. As a Christian, he continued his search for the truth and he came up with a major clarification called *Original Sin*. This was just after his episcopal ordination, while correcting some of his thoughts on evil, sin and grace, supposedly overly coloured by his Manichaean and Neoplatonic background (Bonaiuti, 1917). Original sin to Augustine introduces corruption into the Good God's creation and so becomes the root cause and explanation for the different manifestations of evil in the world.

The transmission of Original sin according to Augustine is by Natural decent from Adam (Augustine, 1853). Augustine's argument is based on the Apostles letter to the Romans 5:12. The Apostle Paul alleged that through one man, sin came into the world and then death came into the world through sin. According to Augustine, Paul referred to Adam

as the bringer of the sin and not Satan (the tempter) because his concern was to establish Adam's sin in relation to his offspring who suffer death universally because of Adam's sins.

For if it were not about this claim of transmission by descent, it would have been appropriate for the Apostle to credit the advent of sin to Satan whom 1 John 3:8 and Wisdom 2:24 already credited to be the first sinner and the one whose envy brought death. St. Paul could have also said that sin came into the world by man's imitation of the death, rather he claimed sin came into the world through Adam. To Augustine that signifies sin in the world because of the progeny of Adam.

Man's freewill or free choice and pride are responsible for original sin and other evil he does, according to Augustine(2010). This is so even though Augustine claims that man was not created evil by a good God and that man's freewill is not a bad gift from the creator (Augustine, 2010). By Adam's freewill, he retrieved good from the world and introduced evil. Therefore, to Augustine, evil in the world is a result of man's created will "wickedly and inordinately choosing the inferior" and not because the will itself is evil(Augustine, 2010).

Augustine believes the will is good because by it humans choose to do justly and enjoy the benefit. By such argument, Augustine leans platonic. Plato, in *Georgia's*, had judged goodness by the reward that is earned. Lastly to Augustine, human will is free and cannot be constrained so far it remains in its power to choose. Not even God's foreknowledge can constrain freewill (Augustine, 2010). To put it briefly, man is guilty for his sin because he chooses by his will which necessarily is free because it chooses. Next, we shall consider the consequences of Original sin which substantiates Augustine's claim of the common experience of Original sin.

Concupiscence and death are both consequences and evidences of the communal nature of Original sin in the eyes of Augustine. Concupiscence is man's inclination to sin. It is experienced because of man's fallen nature due to Adam's sin(Augustine, 1961). Augustine identifies concupiscence in the *Confessions* using his experience as a child who stole pears. He writes, "For of what I stole, I already had plenty and much better than that, and I had no wish to explore Joy in the things I coveted by stealing but only to enjoy the theft itself and the sin"(Augustine, 1961). It is because of this condition of inclination that Augustine proposes that "...without the aid of divine grace, it is impossible for man to love and delight in sanctity".

Augustine sees Original sin as the origin and transmission of human mortality (Augustine, 1958). He wrote, "Such was the greatness of the guilt that the punishment so impaired human nature that what was originally a penalty condition for the first parents who sinned became a natural consequence in all of their defendants". The first consequence of Original sin for our first parent is death(Genesis 2:17). All men participate in death also because they inherited Original sin. Aurelius Augustinus in one of our principal texts, began his argument for original sin by describing the concept of death and two types of death. One he said is of the body and the other of the soul. Both deaths he claims happen twice, the second being the total death. The death of the body he describes as "when the soul departs" the body, while that of the soul which is immortal "because it can never, in the least degree, cease to live and perceive" he described as "when a soul is abandoned by God.". Death at any level, Augustine says, would not be "had our first parents complied with the obligations of obedience"(Augustine, 1958).

Man's progeny comes with the guilt of original sin because the first sin altered the nature of man. Augustine's argument seems to be that a defective tree cannot produce a non defective fruit. When the first parents sinned, it altered the very nature of their being such that they could only but live the mark of 0 they had now become in everything concerning them including birthing offsprings. Augustine's argument is virile for he notes that the first woman existed in man before she was taken out and she who was taken out of Man was not defective because man, by then, had no defects. The following says Augustine's argument concisely:

“God, the Authour of all natures but not of their defects, created man good; but man, corrupt by choice and condemned by justice, has produced a progeny that is both corrupt and condemned. For we all existed in that one man, since taken together, we were the one man who fell into sin through the woman who was made out of him before sin existed (Augustine, 1958).

Remark on Augustine and Original Sin

Augustine's argument is greatly challenged by today's standards of scientific knowledge and human right. The Empiricist cannot agree with Augustine if he claims that the nature of God is good and omnipotent. Being all good and omnipotent should include the power by which to ensure goodness is never withdrawn from his creation. Experience has questioned this 'goodness' and potency of God who has made man capable of introducing evil and has not been able to stop him. The truth of Augustine's argument lies in the source (or efficient cause) of the original imperfect will in the beginning and the determined will by concupiscence.

The so called freewill must have been created evil and so unfree such that Adam but the creator should be blamed for original sin. And in the event of original sin and Concupiscence, the tilting of the will to evil but for Grace should be blamed on the creator's curse of concupiscence, and the cause of original sin and not man because there is no freewill if his choices are already in any sense predetermined (Brown, 1978). Lastly no experience substantiates the doctrine of original sin. The cause of evil in the world is better explained as an experience of cause and effect. Augustine's doctrine is there for at best, mental gymnastics.

The Rationalist, on the other hand, cannot agree with Augustine if he says God is good, omniscient, creator of man and giver of free will but at the same time not to blame for Original sin. Freewill is free but chooses based on a rational process. The quality of free will of Adam and Eve, therefore, depended on their rational quality, and the cause of their rational quality is his omniscient God, its creator who knew man would. Therefore, it is logical to blame the creator for original sin or employ 'Augustine's way out as several have argued for and against (Hunt, 1996). Therefore, if Original sin is a sin, then free will is abolished. If concupiscence is the case, then being too free is only idealistic and not rational. Augustine claimed that man was originally created free, and in his free will, Adam chose evil, altered his nature, and passed on the consequence of concupiscence to his generations, who retained their free will but could no longer choose good except by grace. This subscription to voluntarism (Murphy, 2019) by Augustine comes with obvious problems of who is responsible for the “initial willing of evil by Adam Brown, 1978) Augustine's argument, which gives God credit for created nature, should rightfully also give God credit for its fall. Following the same line of Argument, Augustine cannot claim by “pride goes

before the fall (Eccl 10:15)" that man is responsible for any sin because the cause of sin is man's pride. This is so because man is not the creator of his attributes and whoever did is responsible for it. "In this circumstance, it is emphatically not true that "pride goeth before the fall." Instead, pride is the fall (Eccl 10:15).

Lovers of Justice cannot agree with Augustine that the Creator is good and just, yet has not shielded even innocent children from guilt they have not committed, even though he accepts the child is a new soul. St Augustine, in his work, claims that God is good, created man good and full of love and provided all things for him (Augustine, 1958). In the Garden of Eden man did not even age or witness any defects but until original sin. Afterwards, the good God sets his plan of redemption by grace. Here, there exists a contradiction that a God so good would be unjust to hold the innocent guilty or would, in his excellence, prefer to permit another evil of a bloody bath on Calvary to cleanse original sin and other sins, and give redemptive grace. Augustine, while he described the tainted nature due to original sin writes "For in your sight no man is free from sin, not even a child who has lived only one day on earth(Augustine, 1961). One may ask how good is God if truly Augustine is right? What role has the child or other humans played in the fall of Adam? Does goodness not connote justice for the innocent? Or does committing sin or moral judgment(as Montague Brown writes) no longer connote Augustine's freewill to choose evil over good or to cause a privation of good(Brown, 2005). On another note, does the nature of sin allow it to be transmission like a contractual biological disease as Augustine systematically claims?

Original Sin and Nigeria's Problem of Evil

We have seen how today's science may disagree with Augustine. Now we shall see how the premises surrounding original sin may help explain Nigeria's woes. Nigerians are known to be very successful once they have to, while they live outside the confines of her beautiful terrain of about 923,768 square kilometres comprising of far reaching farm land, water resources and Tourism assets, yet not less than 40.1% (that is 82.9million, and 4 out of 10) of her people live in poverty. Poverty, nonetheless, is not her only problem: there is an endemic problem of politics and corruption in almost all facets of her national life -religious and traditional institutions, shamefully inclusive. Just as the paradise of Eden was disfigured by Original sin and its effect, Nigeria's evil have been caused by her own people and institutions using their freewill. Her original sin is abuse of her freewill.

Nigerians often excuse their evil with terms such as 'Nigerian time', survival of the fittest and so on, but when it comes to a foreign land where institutions work, only the justified worker can use wealth and where people are held accountable, Nigerians do not appeal to such indications of man's fallen state and concupiscence. Afterall, Augustine has not said that man's fallen nature renders him incapable of choosing or doing good at all. If he had nevertheless, Nigerians are religious people, so if it is a matter of grace to aid our fallen nature, we will not lack grace either from the God of the Christians and Muslims or our ancestors and traditional gods who are ever in supplication for us before the Almighty Deity.

This bend towards evil in our society is irrational because we are all victims at the end of the day. Despite the virtue of a Democracy whose papers and institutions promote the benefit for all, our choices have continued to support or perpetuate Nepotism, political rascality and ballot box snatching. The evil of epidemic corruption in the socio-political life of the Nigerian society is not justified by Augustine's argument of original sin and its

concupiscence tainted human nature or pervasive freewill. It is rather exonerated by it because of freewill and grace. Nigerians therefore are both the cause and victims of Nigeria's evil.

Conclusion

In this work we have presented the premises by which St. Augustine argue and defend original sin as follows: That there is an omnipotent, just and good God who created all things good(man inclusive); Man has freewill and through it introduces the first evil into the world by retrieving good from creation and not by creating evil; Hence man's nature was altered; and since a bad seed can not produce a good fruit, original sin is transferred in man through progenies. We have also noted profound arguments against Augustine's doctrine. Nevertheless, admitting the soundness of these thoughts, it has not provided all the answers for the problem of evil and so we submit, with Montague Brown, that it would be unjustified to maintain that freewill or the Creators providence over his creation is not real. One should rightly keep in mind that "the model for all Augustine's thought is faith seeking understanding. Augustine insists in a number of places that the faith requires us to believe both that God is provident and that we are free"(Brown, 2005). Though this is at the same time the strength and weakness of Augustinus' justification, it is philosophically sound because there is a Christian Philosophy which as a world view, has its principles built on faith and reason (Brown, 2005) and luckily such views have always given new perspective to reason (Aldwinckle, 1967).

We have also considered the Nigeria's problem of evil despite all the goodness in her land and her people. Thus taking Nigeria as a specific Garden of goodness just like Eden was, we have shown that she is responsible for her woes, using Augustine's arguments surrounding Original sin and man's fallen nature and freewill. In all of these, we can conclude by saying that Aurelius Augustinus had a real big influence in establishing and shaping not just Early Christian Philosophy but the discuss of the Problem of Evil. And the relevance of Augustine or his doctrines (especially of Original sin) in our day or in the future, show no sign of slowing down.

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