

Determinants of National Prosperity Beyond the Scope of Economics (Evidence from Proverbs 14:34)

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Abstract. Despite tremendous economic potentials, Africa - the second largest continent in the world is ironically described as the continent of backwardness. Though rich in natural and economic resources, which are foundational to economic growth, development and welfare, its population of over one billion has more than 50 percent living in abject poverty. This paradox of poverty in the midst of wealth has often been attributed to poor and corrupt leadership which is unable to appropriate the vast wealth and resources of the African nations into enviable potentials. Poor and stagnating countries which exhibit economic backwardness are often associated with leaders and followers with poor moral values, ineffective and corrupt public policies that confer rents to a privileged few. This makes it evident that economic waste, fraud and misuse of national resources which makes these countries stagnant are issues of morality. In the same vein, businesses cannot operate in a moral vacuum, the absence of decency and trust breaks down commerce, an aspect of economic activity that drives trade and exchange. The objective of this paper was therefore to reconsider the determinants of national prosperity. With highlight on Nigeria, this paper explores the concept of “righteousness and sin” and their usage in Proverbs 14:34 as determinant of national prosperity. Using the historical-grammatical approach, the study examines the pericope to unravel principles foundational for national prosperity. We proposed that adhering to moral principles, as echoed in Proverbs 14:34, could form the bedrock of prosperity for nations particularly in Africa. We concluded that anchoring the economic principles that drive productivity with moral infrastructure might salvage the African nation from perpetual obscurity.

Keywords: Moral Infrastructure, National Prosperity, Reproach, Righteousness, Sin

1. Introduction and Background to the Study

Economics, the science of wealth creation, was foundationally considered to be value free and amoral because economic agents acted not out of benevolence but were motivated by expected outcomes. Orthodox economics for instance suggest that the pursuit of self-interest will lead to the benefit of society. In other words, social problems will be non-existent if everybody looks after his own self-interest. However, self-interest when not regulated could lead to greed. Many have argued that pure capitalism with its economic dynamism does not need, and is often inhibited by the intrusion of ethical considerations into business behaviour. Accordingly, greed sometimes disguised as self-interest should be allowed to drive the pursuit of profit, to enhance societal wellbeing. Evidences however reveal that the doctrine of self-interest with the absence of moral undertones have proved to be very unreliable in building a good society; it rather encourages instability, insecurity, inequity, market failure, poor economic development and a viscous cycle of poverty. Thus, Taylor (2014) asserts that while economic issues may want to sidestep moral issues, moral issues are not willing to sidestep economics. Similarly, Proverbs 14:34 links national prosperity with ethics of ‘righteousness’ contrasting it with the adverse implications of ‘sin’.

Morality – conformity to ideals of right human conduct or individual values and convictions about the scope of application of norms of good conduct – is an important factor in individual behaviour and

thus economic outcomes Tabellini (2007). While Milton Friedman notes that the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits, he further noted that the businesses must conform to the basic rules of the society, both those embodied in law and those embodied in ethical custom. McCloskey (2006) identified seven virtues of economic life - love (benevolence and friendship) which makes people generous towards one another, faith which breeds strong confidence in the pursuit of economic activities, hope which expresses optimism in entrepreneurship, courage the bedrock of endurance and perseverance, temperance which promotes restraint and humility, prudence an apt sense of foresight that facilitates risk-taking, and justice that drives integrity and honesty in economic activities. Luigino and Robert (2013) on their own suggested that participation in work and commerce cannot be separated from attributes such as trust and trustworthiness, respect for the wishes of others, and perceiving others as potential partners in a mutually beneficial transaction. Evidences support the notion that when societies develop reputations for responsible behaviours they reap benefits that are sustained beyond the immediate gain.

Poor and stagnating countries which exhibit economic backwardness are often associated with leaders and followers with poor moral values, ineffective and corrupt public policies that confer rents to few privileged elites. As Tabellini (2007) observed, these countries are also characterised with corrupt practices inside public and private organizations. This makes it evident that economic waste, fraud and misuse of national resources which makes these countries stagnant are issues of morality. In the same vein, business cannot operate in a moral vacuum, the absence of decency and trust breaks down commerce, an aspect of economic activity that drives trade and exchange.

Literature clearly identifies economic factors as necessary for driving growth and development in a country. It is important however, to note that these factors do not operate in isolation. They are often influenced by other tangible and intangible factors which could induce or inhibit their growth. Traditionally, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has always been used as a simple measure of progress in many countries. An increasing GDP or economic growth has historically enabled societies to improve the livelihood of their members, including the poorest and most vulnerable. GDP per capita also serves as an indicator of a society's standard of living – the level of its material welfare – because it captures the value of all goods in the economy as consumed by

households, governments, or businesses. As such, it is an enormously useful measure of national production indicating when a country is materially better or worse off. National prosperity however looks beyond the level of production in a country. In the words of Subonis (2017), national prosperity is what makes life good for a citizen in a country. In addition to production, national prosperity takes into consideration equity and political freedom, it affords opportunities to everyone for personal and professional fulfilment. Porter (1990) in the Harvard Business Review succinctly noted that national prosperity is created, not inherited. It does not grow out of a country's natural endowments, its labour pool, its interest rates, or its currency's value... long term national prosperity is driven by the choices and actions of leaders. It is anchored on good governance.

Good governance is the transparent and accountable management of human, natural, economic and financial resources for the purposes of equitable and sustainable development (Cotonou Partnership Agreement, 2000). It is deducible therefore that a great deal about good governance relates to the proper and effective utilization of national resources and hence a major determinant of economic performance. Invariably, the evolution of good governance in a country could reduce the failure of state and promote economic prosperity.

Literature is replete with the notion that countries which have pursued and practiced good governance have been able to attain and sustain faster economic growth (Wijewardena, 2019; Kraipornsak, 2018; Liu, Tang, Zhou and Liang, 2018; Mira and Hammadache, 2017). These countries have been able to do so by upholding certain principles which fosters participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, mediation of different interest groups in the society, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability (Sheng, 2009). Other qualities such as political stability and absence of violence and terrorism, regulatory quality which captures the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development, and control of corruption have also been identified as core values of good governance which promotes and sustains economic prosperity (Wijewardena, 2019). On the contrary, countries with poor governance that have been unable to imbibe and practice the principles identified have remained backward and under developed for centuries (Adeyemi, 2017; Campbell, 2016; Boynton, 2002) Bad governance has also been identified as one of the major initiating cause of all evil within our societies Sheng (2009).

From the foregoing, it becomes impossible to separate good governance from good ethical leadership – a form of leadership in which individuals demonstrate conducts for the common good that is acceptable and appropriate in every area of life (Vallanova University, 2019). Without the duo in a society, it may be impossible to achieve and to sustain effective administration to ensure the achievement and sustenance of societal goals which is ultimately summarised in welfare improvement for the people. Since good governance also means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal, it follows that good governance cannot also be separated from good economics – economics done right whose ultimate purpose is to understand and promote the enhancement of well-being (Bernanke, 2012)

Bad governance or poor leadership has often been identified as the bane of Africa. Not only has leadership in Africa disappointed the people, they have also betrayed the trust of the people. The British High Commissioner in Nigeria, Ambassador Paul Arkwright in 2018 rightly described African countries as great in potentials but lacking in good leadership system. He further reiterated that true leadership should be viewed from the perception of rendering services to the people rather than turning the citizens into victims of servitude. It may be concluded that a lack of effective leadership is the common denominator when it comes to problems facing Africa.

Africa could grow and thrive by imbibing good governance. While it is assertive that industry and economy conduct nations to wealth and independence, good morals are the props and safeguards of society. Thus, economic prosperity may be impossible without moral infrastructure. Confucius (6th Century BCE) once stated “that the material prosperity of a nation does not consists in its material prosperity, but in righteousness (right-doing). He further reiterated that to govern is to be upright (Singh, 2008). Lending credence to the above, White (1903) stated that the strength of nations, as of individuals, is not found in the opportunities or facilities that appear to make them invincible; it is not found in their boasted greatness. It is measured by the fidelity with which they fulfill God’s purpose in the ordinary business of life. We emphasize that leadership that promotes a positive atmosphere is one that will drive productivity to the point of prosperity for the African nation.

The objective of this paper is therefore to answer the following questions: How can Africa achieve a better future for her citizens? How can the future of today’s young and the generations after them inherit a stronger economy? How can Africa overcome an endemic poverty and current unemployment crisis and achieve prosperity for all? How can corruption become a tale in Africa? Can African countries become prosperous? With highlight on Nigeria, this paper explores the concept of “righteousness and sin” and their usage in Proverbs 14:34 as determinant of national prosperity. Using the historical-grammatical approach, the study examines the pericope to unravel principles foundational for the prosperity. We propose that adhering to moral principles, as echoed in Proverbs 14:34, could form the bedrock of prosperity for nations particularly the African nation. To this extent, anchoring the economic principles that drive productivity with moral infrastructure might salvage the African nation from perpetual obscurity.

2. Textual and Contextual Analysis of the Pericope

2.1 A Critical View of Proverbs 14:34 and Issues of Methodology and Hermeneutics Concerning Righteousness.

The text from Proverbs reads: “Righteousness exalthe a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” Gordis (1943, pp. 104-105, 115) has observed that Proverbs stands out “in the sharpest possible contrast with the rest of the Bible.” Proverbs 14:34 clearly establishes a utilitarian morality that naturally translates into a positive view of reward and retribution. As a general overview, the book promotes intentional emphasis to God’s wisdom and its relationship to creation (Prov 3:19-20; 8:22-31), and also provide a variety of insight to the dealing of man in relation to his environment. Affirming this position Crenshaw (1998, p. 53) added that the writer of the book had distinctive Yahwistic faith rooted in the two basic principles that God is known (1) through experience and observation of the order he has entrenched in creation and (2) through God’s deeds and words in salvation history, in contrast to the mainstream traditions of Israel.

This paper succumbs to explore the concept of “righteousness” and its usage in Proverbs 14:34 as determinant of national prosperity. The background of Proverbs 14:34 suggestively transcends beyond its immediate audience, with probability that the application of the term “Righteousness” is multifaceted and might as well mean righteous, and/or the righteousness of God. Though, scholars

are divided on a number of issues concerning righteousness that border on methodology and hermeneutics, it is obvious that, matters of methodology and hermeneutics are intricate and influence the conclusions that scholars reach on every doctrine of Scripture.

Experts in lexical studies of semantics argue that righteousness is a derivative of the Hebrew *s-d-q* (BDB, 841; VanGemeren, Vol. 3, 1997, 744-768; Harris, 1981, pp. 1879b). While the likes of Jepsen (1965, pp. 76, 81) and Schmid (1968, 88-90) maintain that there is a distinction between the masculine (*sedeq*) and feminine (*sedaqah*) nouns. Jepsen emphasizes that *sedeq* refers to right order in the community; while *sedaqah*, refers to order in creation. And therefore, righteousness of God is His saving design in action (1965, 78, 99). But some others like Snaith (1946), G. von Rad (1966), Watson (1988), object this distinction. Scullion (1971) reasons that *sedeq* and *sedaqah* are translated by assortment of terms in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible especially as it depends on a given literary context. Nevertheless, several scholars maintain that the range of usage for the masculine and feminine is basically the same (Freedman, 1992; BDB, 841; VanGemeren, Vol. 3, 1997, 744-750; Harris, 1981, pp. 1879b). In other words, righteousness is primarily “proper order, proper comportment” and God’s saving action.

This lexical approach examines derivatives of the roots *s-d-q* (righteous), *m-s-p-t* (justice), *r-h-m* (mercy), *h-s-d* (steadfast love) and other lexemes which are used in parallel with *s-d-q* as evident in Psalm 36:5-6a[6-7a], which extols divine *sdq*:

- Your love (*hesed*), O LORD, reaches to the heavens,
- Your faithfulness (*’emuna*) to the skies
- Your righteousness (*sedaqah*) is like the mighty mountains,
- Your justice (*mispal*) like the great deep (VanGemeren, Vol. 3, 1997, 761)

2.2 *Sedaqah* – Righteousness

Biblical Hebrew word construction is based on ‘roots.’ It could be said that roots **are a fundamental key to understanding meanings and relationships**. The masculine *sedeq* occurs 118 times, while the feminine *sedaqah* occurs 156 times and as far as can be established, there is no difference in meaning between the two forms (Snaith 1964, p. 72). *Sedeq* and *sedaqah* share a common root, *saddiq*. This root

translated be just, righteous (*qal*), be justified, put right (*nif’al*), justify, make appear righteous (*pi’el*), do justice, declare righteous, make right (*hiph’il*), justify (*hithpa’el*), basically connotes conformity to an ethical or moral standard. A study of the word can lead to the proper understanding of the kind of righteousness that exalts a nation. Snaith (1964) suggests the original significance of the root *s-d-q* to possibly be “to be straight” (p. 73). Lexical analysis of *sedaqah* provides the various nuances of meaning thus: 1. *righteousness*, in government: a. of judge, ruler, king: *mispal* (Isa 5:7, 9:6, Am 5:7, 6:12) b. of law, *mispalim* (Deut 33:21). c. of Davidic king, Messiah, *mispal* (Psalm 72:1, 72:3, Is 9:6, Jer 23:5, 33:15). 2. God’s attribute as sovereign (Psalm 36:7, 71:19); in government, (Psalm 99:4, Jer 9:23); administering justice (Job 37:28); punishment (Isa 1:27, 5:16, 10:22, 28:17, Dan 9:7); vindication of his people (Micah 7:9). 3. *righteousness*, in a case or cause, Job 27:6 *on my righteousness I hold fast*; of God’s judgments, (Isa 57:12 (iron.)); 4. *righteousness* = *truthfulness*, (Isa 48:1, Zech 8:8; in word Is 45:28, 63:1, oath Jer 4:2) . 5. *righteousness*, as ethically right (Gen 30:33 (J) Deut 6:25, Is 33:5, 41:18, Ezra 14:14, 14:20, Prov 10:2, 11:4, 11:5, 11:18, 11:19+17); 6. *righteousness* as vindicated, *justification, salvation*, etc.: a. of God (Isa 45:8, 46:13, 51:6 +7; Psalm 24:6, Isa 54:17; Psalm 36:11, 103:17; Mal 3:20 *sun of righteousness* (with healing); b. of people, = *prosperity*, (Pr 8:18; *early rain for prosperity* Josh 2:23) 7. pl. *righteous acts*: a. of God Judges 5:11, 5:11, 1 Sam 12:7, Micah 6:5; vindication of right Psalm 103:6; redemptive Isa 45:24, Dan 9:16. b. of man’s moral conduct Isa 64:5, Jer 51:10, also prob. Ezek 3:20, 18:24, 33:13 (BDB, 741).

Estes (2007) asserts that the book of Proverbs teaches that righteousness is not found by accident. Instead, the road to righteousness begins with searching for wisdom, which Yahweh has set forth, as a hidden treasure and to follow its pathway (2:5, 7). This path requires diligent effort, for “he who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor” (21:21). In reference to the foregoing, Estes (2007), quoting Clifford (1999) and Garrett (1993) opine: By devoting intense determination to pursuing righteousness, one not only finds God’s way, but also receives the benefits of life in the various dimensions and honor within the community. In moral terms, *sedeq* or *sedaqah* refers to an ethical, moral standard which is akin to the nature and will of God, which in turn is an expression of His holy character. In Proverbs, *sedaqah* bears the distinguishing marks of wisdom and truthfulness. According to 9:10, reverence for Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, so

sedaqah consists of actions and attitudes that respect the character of Yahweh. The antithetical parallelism of 12:17 reflects how truthfulness is a measure of righteousness. Estes (2007) asserts: Righteousness does not bend or break the truth (*'emet*), but rather it corresponds to what is accurate, and in so doing it furthers the cause of justice (see also McKane, 1970).

Proverbs 20:28 elucidate that fact that truthfulness is a key element in effective leadership in the realm of government – a divine pattern that should permeate every aspect of administration, including justice for the poor and less privileged (cf. 2 Sam 7:12-16; Psalm 89:20-37). Further, truthfulness (*'emet*), synonym of righteousness (*sedaqah*), must also prevail in the marketplace. Discussing the effect of insincere merchandise, Ross (1991) asserts: “Whenever haggling or negotiation over price occurs, there is the danger of legitimate shrewdness turning into a deceitful and unethical misrepresentation of the product in order to get the best deal.” Two closely related proverbs in 20:10 and 20:23 warn against the practice of using two sets of measures or a rigged set of scales in order to gain an unjust advantage. These untruthful practices are detested by Yahweh. Although the crooked merchant’s cheating may go undetected, Yahweh sees and abhors all such pretense (Clements 1996 noted in Estes (2010).

In Hebrew proverbial thoughts, *sedaqah* and its synonyms are required in relationships (3:28), as Prov 24:28 and 25:18 warn against bearing false witness against a neighbor. This idea of a ‘neighbor’ will include business partners, fellow citizens and strangers. It is righteousness that delivers one from the bankrupt values of a materialistic culture (10:2), providing protection for the person of integrity against the wickedness that overthrow the sinner (13:6), and leads to personal and national popularity and respect (16:13, 31). Of great significance is the fact that *sedaqah* is the basis of effective leadership, as a throne is established through righteousness (16:12; 25:5). In 31:8-9, Lemuel is challenged to rule righteously by being a champion for the powerless. Estes concludes: “A fundamental feature of righteousness is that it holds to what is right rather than to what is expedient. Instead of bowing to the powerful interests of society, the righteous leader must take the initiative to speak up for those who cannot defend themselves even though they are in the right on the issue” (Estes, 2007). In sum, *sedaqah* protects those who are vulnerable to mistreatment by those who can manipulate the system to their own unfair advantage.

Righteousness therefore can be said to mean a wholistic blameless behavior, and honesty (Gen 30:33; Isa 48:1; Jer 4:2); involving the conduct of the entire being (Prov 15:9); the exercise of justice as human judge (Gen 18:19); justice as characteristics of God the divine judge (Isaiah 5:16); a religious attitude of truth and purity; godliness (2Sam 22:21-25); to show expectant behaviour to God (Gen 15:6); God’s justice and expectations for man’s conduct with man (Deut 33: 21); reliable; truth (Is 45:23); salvation and deliverance from God (Is 46:12); legal claims (Jer 51:10); God’s acts of justice (1Sam 12:7) just acts of men (Isa 33:15); godliness (Ezr 18:24); legal claim (2Sam 19:29); blamelessness (Isa 5:23) (Snaith (1964; BDB, 841; VanGemeren, Vol. 3, 1997, 744-750; Harris, 1981, pp. 1879b).

Righteousness involves the conduct of men with one another. It is the quality of relationships that exist between individuals and is exhibited through conformity to standards set out in the word of God (Achte-meier, 1959, pp. 68-70). A righteous person(s) invests in the peace and prosperity of the community by fulfilling the commands of God in respect to others. Ultimately, the righteous (*saddiq*) man is one who serves God (Mal 3:18). In the Septuagint, righteousness (*sedeq*) is frequently translated *dikaiousune* meaning integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking, feeling and acting, the condition acceptable to God. It is synonymous with virtue.

2.3 Righteousness in the Christian Gospel

The Christian gospel has contributed tremendously toward establishing righteousness and justice in the world. Although some Christians tend to promote prosperity gospel of wealth which most times undermine the essence of righteousness (Booth, 2017). Promoters of prosperity theology emphasize personal empowerment (Coleman, 2000), the well-being of the physical and spiritual realities shown in one’s physical health and economic prosperity (Hunt, 2000, p. 332). It claims that a believer has been given power over creation as the image of God. Positive confession allows the Christian believer to exercise dominion over their environment (Coleman, 2000, p. 28), alleviation of sickness, poverty, and spiritual corruption (Hunts, 2000, p. 333). Gbote and Kgatla (2014, pp1-10) and Ellington (2014, pp. 327-342) reiterate that adherents are made to focus on questionable promises of health and wealth in this life for individual personal benefits rather than true righteousness. These views may be strange altogether to the teachings of the apostles.

The apostle Paul who dealt extensively on the theme of righteousness states: “He (God) made him who did not know sin to be sin for our sake, in order that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2Cor 5:21). In the mind of Paul, God intends a conferral of His righteousness upon His people. In this sense, righteousness is not an abstract form of being or a doing of individual selection process, rather, a conferral, made possible by the dying of a sinless (guiltless) party in order that the sinful (guilty) party might become justified. Thrall (1994, p. 442) puts it this way: “The traditional understanding of ‘becoming God’s righteousness’ is that it means ‘being justified by God.’” God does the justification not by anyone’s doing. It is a change of status from guilty to justified. Hooker (2008, p. 369) observes that most interpreters interpret *dikaiosunē* (righteousness) in the genitive, “righteousness from God” having the definitive meaning of *dikaiēthentes* (“having been justified”), Paul probably meant that believers are given the verdict that they are righteous. The same noun *dikaiosunē* (not the participle *dikaiēthentes*) is evident in 2 Cor 3:9; 6:7, 14; 9:9-10; and 11:15. Richard Hays (1996:24) feels rather that Paul “does not say ... ‘that we might receive the righteousness of God.’ Instead, the church is to become the righteousness of God.” Otherwise, Paul’s assertion that believers become God’s righteousness is not the same as saying that believers are justified, or pronounced righteous. This contrasts widely with the positions of Harris (2005, p. 455) and Collins (2013, p. 126), who interpret *dikaiosunē* in 2 Cor 5:21 as essentially meaning “justification”. Thrall (1994, p. 444) speaks mainly of a “change in status”, though affirms that Paul has in mind more than simple imputation, because of believer’s status of being united with Christ. Thrall states further that “in the first half of the verse 21, Paul has described the first element of a dual process of identification and exchange” (1994, p. 442). Therefore, it is appropriate to submit that God’s conferral of righteousness on believers is not only juridical but also deeply concerned with transformation. This kind of transformation brings about selfless services to a community for the sole purpose of building national prosperity. “Righteousness exalts a nation...” could imply that any nation that accepts the righteousness of God and productively engages its people with the tenets of such righteousness will ultimately be exalted.

2.4 Sin is a Reproach to Any Nation

The concept of sin is a central theme to the Christian faith for which the fundamental message is about redemption in Christ (Rahner, Karl, Schoonberg,

Piet, 1986: 1588). Christian hamartiology according to Sabourin (1993) describes sin as an act of offence against God by despising His persons and Christian biblical law, and by injuring others. In Christian views it is an evil human act, which violates the rational nature of man as well as God's nature and His eternal law. Sin is understood by many as legal infraction violation of nonbinding philosophical framework of Christian ethics, in fact, “all unrighteousness is sin” (1 Joh 5:17); a fundamentally irrational loss of love. In the ethics of the Christian religion, a major principle is the rule for one to love his neighbour as oneself (Matt 22:39). Where there is love, righteousness thrives. That is a divine instruction, but a lack brings about disobedience and transgression against God (1 Joh 3). In as much as unrighteousness is wired in the mainframe of governance, reproach will remain the lot of the nation.

3. Righteousness and Prosperity: The Nexus in Proverbs 14:34

Righteousness is a choice we make in our manner of behavior as an act of our will. It is not something that comes upon people through mere desire. It is cultivated in our life by our actions. Righteousness exalteth a nation or the exercise of true moral uprightness in every department of a nation's activity will set such a nation up on high, tending to give it material prosperity, for God rewards civil righteousness (Kretzmann, date). Righteousness signifies justice and honest dealing and it is a product of religion. Though religion has been seen by many as being opposed to national welfare and capable of depriving people of their right to the conveniences of life, when rightly practiced, religion and virtue can propel a nation to public prosperity. For instance, the British Empire reached its greatest height of glory and greatness during the reign of Queen Victoria. History tells us that Queen Victoria was a very god-fearing queen with a good administration. Religion which promotes righteousness is the greatest obligation upon conscience to all civil offices and moral duties.

Prosperity is what makes life good for a citizen in a country. It is more than just the accumulation of material wealth, but also as the joy of everyday life and the prospect of being able to build an even better life in the future. Prosperity is about things going well for people, in accordance with their hopes and expectations. A study on GDP and Beyond identified eight measures of national prosperity as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Dimensions of National Prosperity



Source: www.prosperity.com

Prosperity speaks of the elimination of hunger and homelessness, end of poverty and injustice, a thriving health and education sectors, personal and collective safety of persons and property and hopes for a secure and peaceful society with governance built on integrity and uprightness. Without some realistic way of translating all the dimensions into reality, prosperity remains an illusion. The existence of a credible and robust mechanism for achieving prosperity therefore matters (Jackson, 2009).

Masjutina (2018) pointed out that national prosperity is anchored on both hard power (coercive power executed through threats and economic inducement based on tangible resources such as the military and economic abundance) and soft power (persuasive power or the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. It is based on culture, political values and national policies.) Whether a country decides to use either hard or soft power, national prosperity cannot be separated from the system and nature of leadership or governance.

Exaltation means promotion to a state of dignity and honour, usefulness and happiness. Exell (n.d.) illustrate the manner in which righteousness exalts a nation or brings it prosperity. First righteousness exalts the intellectual state of a nation. It encourages the cultivation of the mind, and enlightens the reason. Secondly, righteousness exalts the moral state of a nation. It unfolds the foundation of genuine morality, and affords the ability of conforming to its precepts.

By drawing forth into proper exercise the faculties, and forming correct habits, righteousness exalts the morals of individuals and nations. Thirdly, righteousness exalts the political state of a nation. It adds its sanctions to the authority of government. It teaches and enforces subordination. It establishes parental authority and family discipline, without which civil communities cannot flourish. Fourthly, righteousness exalts the social state of a nation or their manners. It influences a people to combine gravity with cheerfulness. Lastly, righteousness exalts a nation by promoting its physical state or its natural resources, such as its population, wealth, and means of defence. The exaltation of a nation is total when it consists in its intellectual, moral, political, social, and physical excellence.

Neither literature nor history affirms righteousness as the sole determinant of national prosperity. Argument against such notion can be seen from (1) the abuses which religion has caused in society, (2) idolatrous or atheistic nations, that have arrived at a great height of prosperity, (3) instance in which vice has proved of more advantage to a state than virtue, (4) the evils which the most virtuous societies suffer. This is to suggest that while true religion and the power of godliness is the beauty and bulwark of a state; so are good laws, enacted and executed (Trapp, n.d.). In other words, while righteousness (godly attributes) has its part to play in driving national prosperity, the natural conscience and man's shrewdness has been

proven to drive prosperity in nations although history has shown that such prosperity is often short-lived.

Keil and Delitzsch (n.d.) commenting on Proverbs 14:34 pointed out that history everywhere confirms the principle, that not the numerical, nor the warlike, nor the political, nor yet the intellectual and the so-called civilized greatness, is the true greatness of a nation, and determines the condition of its future as one of progress; but this is its true greatness, that in its private, public, and international life, conduct directed by the will of God, according to the norm of moral rectitude, rules and prevails. Righteousness, good manners, and piety are the things which secure to a nation a place of honour, while, on the contrary, sin – all forms of evil sufficing - is a disgrace to the people. It lowers them before God, and also before men who do not judge superficially or perversely.

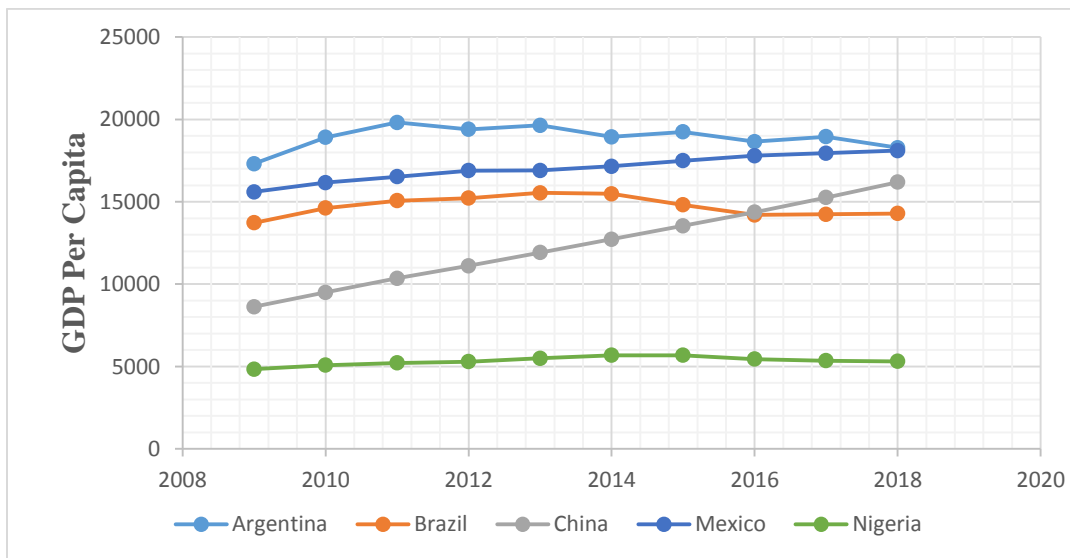
4. Nigeria in Adversity of Prosperity

Prosperity indicators are a range of characteristic which serve as categorization criteria that helps in organizing countries into groups identified as developed (prosperous), and under developed (poor) countries. Evidences all indicate that Nigeria is far from being a prosperous nation considering the

criteria that are often used to identify such nations. Despite being the largest oil producer with the largest natural gas reserves in Africa, Nigeria has not been able to translate its resource wealth into high living standards for the citizens. Compared with six other randomly selected countries (not African countries since Nigeria is often identified as the giant of Africa) identified as developing counties by the CIA (2019), Nigeria’s statistics is comparatively very dismal.

The per capita GDP (PCI) is often used to categories countries based on their level of development. The countries with the highest PCI are those with high concentration of wealth and hence prosperous. When the PCI is adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP) (PPP is used to equalize the purchasing power of different currencies by taking into account differences in their cost of living and inflation), it becomes a useful equalizer for comparative analysis. Using data from Trading Economics, an online platform that provides historical data, economic forecasts, news, and trading recommendations for 196 countries, Figure 2 shows Nigeria with the lowest PCI compared to other countries with the same level of development.

Figure 2: GDP Per Capita at PPP for Nigeria and other Selected Developing Countries

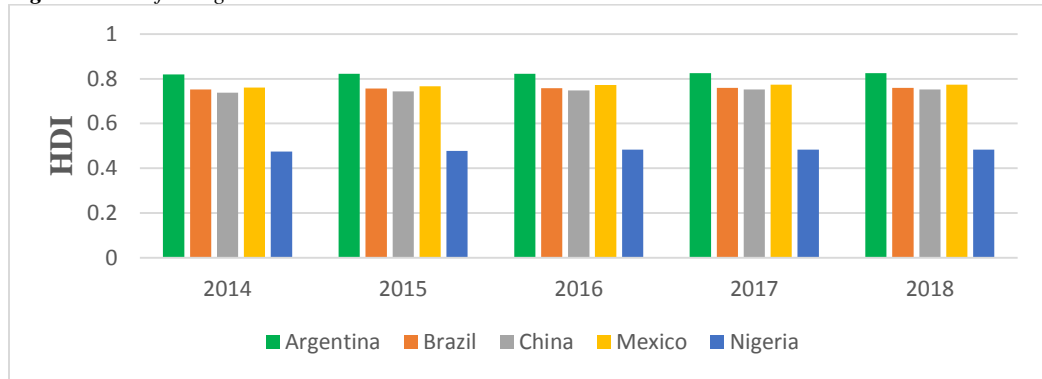


Source: Trading Economics, 2019

The Human Development Index (HDI) is another criterion often used to compare how well nations are doing. The HDI provides a composite statistic that measures key dimensions of human development using metrics of life expectancy at birth to measure a long and healthy life, literacy and educational enrolment to measure being knowledgeable and PCI as a measure of having a descent standard of living (Roser, 2019). The index was created to include human capabilities alongside economic growth as an ultimate criterion for assessing national development.

Using data from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2018), figure 2, comparatively reveals the backwardness of Nigeria in terms of her human capabilities.

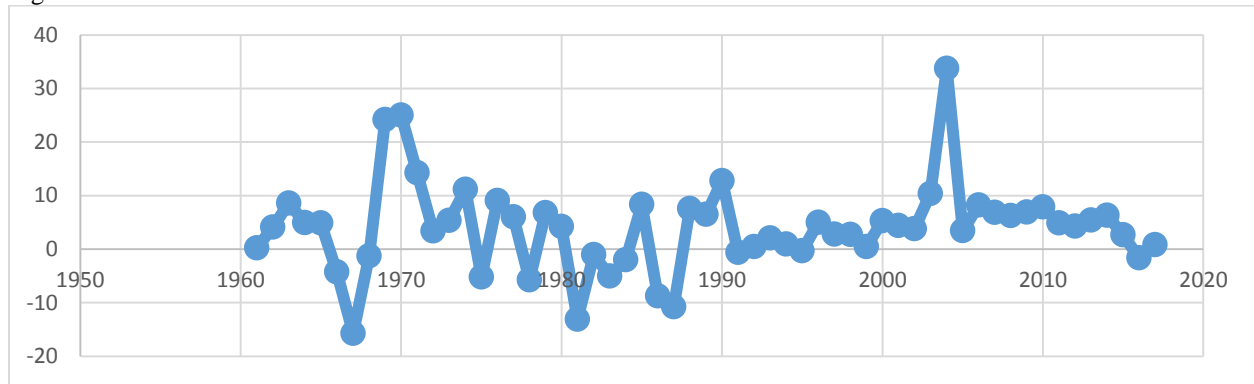
Figure 3: HDI for Nigeria and other Selected Countries 2014 – 2018



Source: UNDP Human Development Data Bank (2018)

The GDP growth rate in Nigeria shows no apparent improvement as evident in figure 4. For 57 years, growth rate in GDP averaged 3.99% though 13.8% growth rate in GDP was proposed if Nigeria was to become one of the largest economies in the world by 2020 (NPC, 2009).

Figure 4: Growth Rate in GDP 1961 -2017



Source: CBN Statistical Bulletin, 2018

Other indicators such as the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) which is a comprehensive picture of people living in poverty permits comparison across countries. Based on the UNDP Human Development Reports (2018), in 2018, the percentage of the population that was multidimensionally poor in Brazil was 3.8%, in China it was 4%, Mexico was 6.3% while 52% was recorded for Nigeria. In 2016, it was reported that 112 million Nigerians live below the poverty level. This, according to the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) represented 67.1% of the country’s total population (Ahiuma-Young, 2016). on June 26, 2018, the World Poverty Clock also reported that Nigeria had overtaken India as the country with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty surviving on less than \$1.90 or approximately ₦684 a day.

The corruption perception index ranks countries based on how corrupt the public sector is perceived to be. The ranking is done on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very honest). Among the countries examined, Nigeria was considered the most corrupt in 2018. While Argentina scored 40, China and Brazil followed closely with respective scores of 39 and 35. Nigeria scored 27 following Mexico closely with 28 (Trading Economics, 2019). Nigeria lags behind other countries in the area of industrialization, poverty is widespread in the country, and large chunk of the country’s population lack access to quality health care and education. The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index (CRI) is an index that ranks governments based on efforts to tackle the problem of inequality. The 2018 report stated that Nigeria had the unenviable distinction of being at the bottom of the index for two years. While China was ranked 81st, Brazil occupied the 39th position out of

157 countries. Inequality the report stated is bad for everyone; in addition to reducing economic growth, it worsens other macroeconomic variables in a country and increases social tensions. The maniac can however be tackled if the government possess the political will to enact and implement policies that will narrow the gap between the rich and the poor through progressive taxation, and increased social welfare spending.

The paradox of poverty in the midst of wealth is the description for Nigeria. Despite being the 6th largest oil exporting country in the world with reserves well in excess of 37 Billion barrels, Nigeria is a chronic importer of Premium Motor Spirit (Petrol, 5.32 bln litres), Automotive Gas Oil (Diesel, 1.30 bln litres) and Dual Purpose Kerosene (Kerosene, 114.19 mln litres) for its national consumption needs in the 4th quarter of 2018 (Gboye, 2018, NBS 2019). The four refineries in the country are either non-functional or fraught with operational and administrative inefficiencies. In addition to oil, the country is blessed with abundance of other resources that are yet to be exploited, including its human resources. With almost 160 accredited universities, a plethora of polytechnics, colleges of education and research institutes, the country still suffers from dearth of quality education and very low per capita productivity. Though over 80% of the land is arable, Nigeria cultivates less than 40% of its arable land (World Bank, 2018) and still remains a net importer of food items. Nigeria is ranked among the poorest in the world in terms of per capita electricity supply and industrialization is almost nonexistent in Nigeria when compared to other emerging economies. Though blessed with abundance of resources, the largest populous black nation, Nigeria, is grossly impeded from national prosperity as a result of corruption, poverty, ethnic conflict and civil unrest, political instability, environmental issues, ethnic nationalism, socio-economic inequalities, and constitutional challenges

Literature consistently alludes to the fact that the Nigerian problem is leadership oriented (Achebe, 1983; Ejere, 2013, Gberevbie, Shodipo, and Oviasogie, 2013; Ehiaghe, 2018; Fasan 2020). While the country wallows in extreme poverty, Nigerian parliamentarians are the most highly paid in the world with a salary of 750,000 naira per month approximately 2000 dollars plus allowances of 13.5 million naira per month, totaling 14.25 million naira per month as revealed by Mr. Shehu Sani a senator for the governing All Progressive Congress (APC) Party who considered the payment of such money for the running of senatorial offices a moral issue since there

is little accountability about how the money is spent (BBC News, March 12, 2018, Campbell, 2018). Former President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo reportedly noted that “the real problem bedeviling Nigeria and the African continent is not the shortage of policies and economic roadmaps, but what he called ‘leadership problem’ driven by government corruption and poor governance (Agbonile, 2017; The Premium Times, 2017, Omoniyi, 2018;).

5. Implications of Proverbs 14:34 for Nigeria

Can Nigeria achieve a better future for her citizens? The answer is yes. Proverbs 14:34 provides a foundation for sustained prosperity – righteousness an attribute that must be imbibed by the leadership in Nigeria. Confucius is noted as saying: *“Who dares not to be upright if you yourself (the leader) are upright? If the ruler acts properly, the common people will obey him without being ordered to: if the ruler does not act properly, the common people will not obey him even after repeated injunctions”* (Singh, 2008).

If righteousness is administered by the government, it will be exercised by subjects towards one another and it will become a norm or way of life. Achebe (1983) aptly noted that the problem with Nigeria is one of failed leadership. When leadership does not subscribe to accountability in the management of public resources, it stalls the development of the nation. In Nigeria political leadership is more often than not associated with corrupt practices – the abuse of public offices for private gain. Historically, when governance is associated with poor management of public resources, wastage becomes the norm. Resources meant to drive prosperity are cornered into private coffers and poverty becomes endemic in the land.

Homilists commenting on Proverbs 14:34 generally agree that in relation to power and abundance of resources, the true majesty of a kingdom lies in its moral virtue. The state whose heart beats loyally to the eternal principles of rectitude gains an influence upon earth mightier than the mightiest armies or battalions can impart. According to a popular quote, what is morally wrong, cannot be politically correct. Thus, immoral actions or unrighteousness cannot be excused on the grounds of political activities. Good governance anchored in righteousness is essential in Nigeria to drive national prosperity. Good leadership in Nigeria will promote growth in social infrastructure, ensure stability of power, construct good roads for safe, easy and affordable transportation, provide basic amenities for the people, ensure good security system by quelling tension

resulting from ethnic differences, such government will seek to make the cost of living affordable for the masses, increase standard of living by instituting an economic atmosphere that encourages the creation of more jobs, in relation to maintaining peace, unity and transparency.

To drive productivity and create wealth in Nigeria, factors such as the availability of natural resources, physical capital or infrastructure, human capital, population, law, innovative technology and functional institutional framework which regulates economic activity are often identified as drivers of output. However, truth, honesty, integrity in a people are the best guarantees of commercial advancement. The more credit a nation has, the more business it can do; and the more business, if rightly conducted, the more will be the accumulation of wealth. The Punch newspaper on February 18, 2018 reported that fake and substandard products are killing Nigeria in the same way corruption is. It is proposed that fifteen billion naira is lost annually to fake goods. This constitutes direct loss of tax revenue, income and jobs to the government, local manufacturers and unemployed respectively. Bishop Newton commenting on Proverbs 14:34 stated that neither public companies nor private persons, can long carry on a beneficial and flourishing trade without virtue which teaches sobriety, industry, frugality, modesty, honesty, punctuality, humanity, charity, the love of our country, and the fear of God. Summarily, it can be said that the absence of righteousness or virtue in the conduct of business denies a nation the opportunity of prospering and jeopardies the future of the growing generation.

How can the future of today's young and the generations after them inherit a stronger economy? How can Africa overcome an endemic poverty and current unemployment crisis and achieve prosperity for all? How can corruption become a tale in Africa? When Nigeria and other African countries embrace righteousness, their nation will be exalted. When greed and avarice are subdued by godly virtue, when justice, reigns in Nigeria, the country will be honoured. A righteous administration of the government, impartial equity between man and man, public countenance given to religion, the general practice and profession of virtue, the protecting and preserving of virtuous men, will exalt our nation Nigeria, these virtues uphold the throne, elevate the people's minds, and qualify a nation for the favour of God which ultimately results in economic prosperity.

6. Conclusions

When a nation is bounded by godly principles or conforms to standards set out in the word of God, it

cannot but grow. Righteousness in any nation enables its people to exercise a just judicial system, an equitable government, enjoying the high favours of peace and fruitfulness. Not only nations, but smaller communities, tribes, cities, and societies of all sorts are betrayed should they be characterized by evil. All right-thinking people will reproach them and God will reject them unless they repent. Righteousness is a succinct recommendation with an antidote for national obscurity. It has the potential to drive and sustain national prosperity such that tribalism, indiscipline, corruption, false image of the people, social injustice and the cult of mediocrity, amongst others will become history. Therefore, anchoring the economic principles that drive productivity with moral infrastructure might salvage the African nation from perpetual obscurity.

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