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The Apathy of Nigerians towards Accident Victims: Lessons from the Christian Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

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Abstract:

The duration of the sick condition of many accident victims in Nigeria has been unduly elongated, sometimes culminating in painful deaths, as a result of the neglect of these victims by those who were supposed to offer immediate help but turned onlookers at accident scenes. This attitude of indifference, however, appears to be justifiable in Nigeria, as interveners have revealed how they were dissuaded from further intervention, by the aftermath of their former intervention, or decision to do so. This then constitutes a problem and point of interest for the patriotic Nigerian. Is this apathy of Nigerians towards accident victims really justifiable? In other words, how much right or wrong does one do when one neglects an accident victim who needs one's help or assistance? A balanced answer to this query should stem from, among others, a study of the causes of this apathetic attitude. Hence, the paper critically analyzed this uncharitable apathy, as well as its justifications or causes in the country. With the use of a phenomenological method of research, it was found among others, that Nigeria police harassment and medical logistics are some of the causes of the apathy. However, lessons were drawn from the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) in order to encourage charitable interventions in accident/disaster scenes.

1. Introduction

Accident is a word used to refer to any unpleasant incident that happens unexpectedly, or a pleasant one that occurs by chance. It is, so, marked by unexpectedness. The Merriam Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus diversely defines it as "an unforeseen and unplanned event or circumstance; an unfortunate event resulting especially from carelessness or ignorance; an unexpected and medically important bodily event, especially when injurious; an unexpected happening causing loss or injury which is not due to any fault or misconduct on the part of the person injured but for which legal relief may be sought". For the purpose of this research, accident was regarded as any unexpected or unfortunate happening, causing serious physical or mental injury. By this, "accident" included road traffic mishaps, criminal activities as armed robbery, rape, murder (attempted) and other forms of physical abuse. "Accident victims", then referred to any unfortunate person, male or female, who suffers from any of the above inauspicious incidents or circumstances. The group of accident victims which was particularly of interest to the researchers is made up of those who sustain(ed) serious injuries, either physically or psychologically.

Following the technological development which characterizes the present era, both developed and developing countries have continued to record cases of accident, both road traffic mishaps and criminal activities. In Nigeria, as in many other countries, the Commissions or Agencies saddled with ensuring road safety have only succeeded in minimizing the number of road-traffic accident cases and not in creating a zero possibility of road accidents. Hence, these accidents continue to occur. Similarly, the security agency(ies) especially the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), has been struggling to significantly abate the level of crime in various areas in the country, but to no avail. Hence, till date, there exist victims of rape and robbery, some of whose experiences are not reported, nor officially recorded by the concerned authorities.

Certainly, by virtue of technological sophistication, more developed societies have systems for quick gathering of emergency information (on road traffic accidents), as well as capabilities of quick and prompt interventions. However, in most developing countries, including Nigeria, this type of arrangement, is barely available generally, and very minimally existent in some parts of the country. This situation, therefore, though without pronouncement, places on the inhabitants of these countries, a moral responsibility to act in place of the government or its agencies, when such intervention is needed in emergencies.

Sadly, this responsibility has suffered neglect from some Nigerians. Hence a sizable number of accident victims in the country, including victims of physical and violent crimes, have met their "waterloo", by virtue of their being uncharitably neglected, by those who were in the position to help them, at the appropriate time. This attitude of negligence was found to be generally based on the belief that it is "risky" to intervene in such circumstance, even when one is supposed to. The objective of this paper is

therefore to discourage this apathy of some Nigerians towards accident victims, through a critical analysis of the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan.

2. Causes of the Apathy/Indifferentism

The following are the causes or apparent justifications for the apathetic attitude of some Nigerians towards accident victims; Police Harassment, Financial Factor/Medical Logistics and Criminal Camouflage. For clarity, these causes are briefly discussed below.

2.1. Police Harassment

The security agencies, especially the Nigeria Police, have been identified by several Nigerians as one of the reasons they neglect accident victims. In the course of carrying out their duties in accident situations, some members of the Police Force, however inadvertently, discourage people from helping accident victims. An intervener narrated his experience with the police, when he was aiding an accident victim. He had come across a helpless and unconscious man, who he then decided to help and continue his journey later. Though he was not sure of the exact form of accident which occurred, the wounds on his body and his state of unconsciousness were evidences that he was involved in a serious mishap. "Unexpectedly", he (the interviewee) said, "the police appeared, interrogation followed, and then I saw myself in the station". This according to him was never part of the plan, which was to immediately help the wounded fellow to access medical service in order to save his life. He had to answer the police, and provided them with some information about the situation. A sadder and more serious experience was that of Mr. Julius Eke, where a victim, probably attacked by armed robbers, died shortly after he was taken to the nearest hospital. He had bullet wounds on the hand and neck. Expectedly, when the information got to the police, Mr. Julius was seriously interrogated. He says, "It was at the conclusion of that case, and the declaration of my innocence that I knew that the neglect of accident victims is the best option; then I decided to desist from further interventions". This decision was confidently taken.

Although, the Nigeria Police Force reserves the right to interrogate, or arrest as a suspect, anyone found in a crime zone, as argued by Superintendent Idoko James- the Area Crimes Officer, Nigeria Police Force, Nsukka Area Command; and which is also contained in the Judges' Rules- (a set of rules guiding the police in the investigation of crime, and the acceptability of the resulting statements and findings as evidences in court) (en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judges%27-Rules); this duty should be carried out or performed with some level of decorum and respect for even a suspect. The rule that a suspect remains a suspect until proven guilty by the law, should also be bored in mind in the exercise of this police right of interrogation. A brutal harassment of voluntary interveners and even suspects is indeed not ideal for a civil society. The Nigeria police authorities, therefore, should guide against the harassment of citizens by some policemen, as this discourages people from collaborating with the police in safeguarding lives and fighting crime in the country.

2.2. Financial Factor/Medical Logistics

The financial aspect of the causes of the apathetic attitude covers the cost of medical services, and other unforeseen expenses, such as that incurred in the identification of the victim and his roots and provision of the victim's basic needs. In most cases, payments are made in order to gain access to medical services. This pre or post treatment payment is only one of the requirements for service provision by many medical institutions. More importantly, a patient or his associate is required to formally accept his responsibility for the patient's agreement with the service provider. This implies that one who intervenes in an accident situation, and decides to take care of the wounded victim, ordinarily, is expected to make some monetary or financial provisions for the victim.

Interestingly, some medical establishments and hospitals have prioritized human life, against money as some persons, perhaps accident victims, receive immediate medical attention in these hospitals, without any prior monetary exchange. In such cases for instance, an accident victim's helper is then required to accept responsibility of the victim, in words and in writing. This requirement, according to Onwurah, the Medical Director of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, is a major element of the medical professional behavior. These are what some Nigerians said have caused their habitual neglect of accident victims Mrs. Ndidi Stella's experience is an unfortunate one. The victim died in the process of medical treatment and then came the need for her to find his (the deceased) family, for proper burial. "It was a terrible experience", she said. This made her to decide on her future disposition towards accident victims. She concluded thus, "when I see an accident victim, I may help, but before then, I have to find out whether I may end up the same way I did".

2.3. Criminal Camouflage

Sadly, some fraudsters and criminals have employed fake accident scenes and victims, as baits. These impostors pretend to be accident victims, usually in isolated areas and non populated places on major roads, and attract kind-hearted passersby, who would later become unfortunate victims of their (the impostors') criminality. These crimes may include rape, robbery, abduction, physical injuries, and even murder. This practice in Nigeria has caused the neglect of accident victims, by both those who have had the experience, and the lucky ones who have not.

3. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37)

3.1. The Background

With the purpose to test Jesus, a lawyer asked him thus, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Cleverly, in good Jewish style, Jesus referred him to the Jewish Law thus "What is written in the Law." "What do you read there?" Jesus asked. "You shall

love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself,” replied the curious lawyer. Evidently, what was being sought by the Jewish lawyer was Jesus’ own idea about the role of God’s law in salvation. He was already aware of the Jewish law, and what it states to be the path to eternal harmony with Yahweh. His question was only a ‘test.’ In approval, Jesus said “You have given the right answer; do this and you will live.”

But then, the lawyer wanted to justify himself. Hence he further asked Jesus “And who is my neighbour?” This time, Jesus was to clarify what he had already established. It was then that he applied his usual use of allegory in teaching and instruction. This is a non common type of narrative, one which places ever strictly severed groups, in unexpected congruence- “A Samaritan helping a man going down from *Jerusalem (the holy city, of the Jews, who were hostile to the Samaritans, just as they were to the Jews)*”. This story is also remarkable because of its implication about Law and eternal life. Marshall (1994:998) puts this thus “We might have expected a parable telling how a Jew should show love to anybody, even to a Samaritan, but in fact, Jesus shows how even a Samaritan may be nearer to the kingdom than a pious, but uncharitable Jew.” To the lawyer’s question, Jesus replied with a parable.

3.2. The Parable

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and fell into the hands of robbers who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds; having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two *denarii*, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Jesus had finished his narration. And then it was the lawyer’s turn to express his comprehension. Jesus then asked him, “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” “The one who showed him mercy,” he replied. He was then charged by Jesus to “Go and do likewise,” in order to inherit eternal life.

3.3. The Analysis of the Parable

By this parable, Jesus suggests that the real question is “Do I behave as a neighbor?” (that is, a person who helps others) and not that which was asked by the lawyer- “Who is my neighbor? (that is, the person whom I should help),” (Marshall, 1994:998). The lawyer asked who his neighbor was, and Jesus narrated a story, after which he asked “Which...do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” Then a reply came- “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said, “Go and **DO** likewise.” Now, the subject was no more the “neighbour who would be loved by one as oneself” but “the neighbour who would love another as he loves himself,” not the “neighbour who is to be showed mercy” but “the neighbour who shows mercy.”

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines a parable as “a short story that teaches a moral or spiritual lesson...” This story may be real or fictional. Its significance does not lie in the narrative per se, but in the lesson it presents. Hence, Fletcher (2009) wrote that “Parables generally show less interest in the story telling and more in the analogy they draw between a particular instance of human behaviour and human behaviour at large.” The parable of the Good Samaritan is an allegorical narrative aimed at the clarification of neighbourliness, and then the facilitation of the achievement/attainment of an elusive spiritual end called eternal life. The dictionary’s definition of ‘neighbour’ is observably different from that of Jesus, as is in the parable. A neighbour, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, is “a person who lives next to you or near you, a country that is next to or near another country, a person or thing that is standing or located next to another person or thing, or (literary) any other human.” By these, a person’s or thing’s being a neighbour to another person or thing is mainly determined by his or its geographical closeness to the person or object. In this sense, it is basically location and distance that define neighbours. But here in the parable, one becomes a neighbour to another if he shows him the needed mercy (Luke 10:37).

There existed disharmony between the Samaritans and the Jews. While the Samaritans were not friendly to Jews, especially when the Jews passed through their territory on the way to Jerusalem, the holy city, the Jews also despised them, (Karris, 1995:701). The Samaritans are “members of a community of Jews, now clearly extinct, that claim to be related by blood to those Jews of ancient Samaria who were not deported by the Assyrian conquerors of the Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC,” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). But in the Talmud, they are called *Kutim*, “... suggesting that they are rather descendants of Mesopotamian Cuthaeans who settled in Samaria after the Assyrian conquest,” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). It is because they were despised that Jews who returned to their homeland after the Babylonian exile refused to be assisted by them in the building of the second temple in Jerusalem, and that the Samaritans later in 4th century BC built their own temple in Shechem, (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). Now in the parable, it is the despised Samaritan, who had “loved his neighbour as himself,” and not even the pious priest, or the Levite. Hence, Karris (1995:702) called Luke 10:25-37 “two-pronged,” for “While providing a powerful lesson about mercy toward those in needs, it also proclaims that non-Jews can observe the law and thus enter into eternal life.” The priest and the Levite were unwilling to help the helpless victim of robbery (accident), probably because of fear of defilement. Karris (1995:702) wrote that “These leading examples of law-observant people do (sic) not aid the stripped and apparently dead man for fear of becoming defiled.” This was indeed a misplaced spirituality as well as a non humanistic religiosity, for a true spirituality must manifest in one’s love for God and one’s neighbor.

3.4. Lessons for Nigerians

The parable of the Good Samaritan has significant and fitting implications for the issue being discussed herein. The robbers, the victim of robbery, the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan, have respective symbolic significance for not only the Nigerian who

have developed attitudinal indifference towards accident victims, but also to those who would, as a result of their past experiences, want to claim blind eyes to accident victims. The “robbers” here signify any unexpected or unfortunate happening, causing serious physical or mental injury, including road traffic mishaps, criminal activities as armed robbery, rape, murder (attempted) and other forms of physical abuse, which leave victims in situations that ordinarily require the support of another human. The man, who was attacked on his way to Jericho, by armed robbers, could be likened to the following in contemporary Nigeria:

- An unfortunate traveler or passerby, who was attacked by robbers, and left with serious paralyzing injuries,
- A vehicle driver or motorcycle rider who was involved in a serious road-traffic mishap,
- A passerby who was seriously injured by a vehicle or motorcycle,
- A victim of violence (example fights), or rape
- A victim of any unexpected or unfortunate occurrence, causing serious physical or mental injury.

In such conditions, victims require the assistance of others, for medical treatment and subsequent recovery. A helpless victim is not only helpless because of lack of energy or ability, to act or function independently; but because his/her prospects in the accident-caused situation, depends not on him/herself, but on others. Hence, a major point of interest in the parable was how three men handled a critical obligation. They could decide either to intervene, or not; and the victim’s recovery or chance of recovery was actually dependent on their decision, and that of other passersby who might have followed the same path, if the Samaritan had acted like the Priest and Levite.

Similar to the first two symbolic groups, the Good Samaritan could be likened to the Nigerian who, despite all the discouraging factors, intervenes in an accident situation, for the good of the victim(s). Indeed, the Good Samaritan had, through that act of charity, broken an age long barrier. The man he helped came from Jerusalem, a holy city, with a temple in which Samaritans were not welcomed. “In the 4th century B.C., the Samaritans built their own temple in Nablus (Shechem), at the base of Mount Gerizim, some 25 miles (40km) north of Jerusalem,”(Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). They had their own separate settlement, somewhat isolated. But then, he was able to place “love and mercy” above every other consideration, unlike the Jewish passersby. It is not quite clear why the law observant Priest and the Levite did not help the victim; however studies show that they probably wanted to prevent defilement, (Karris, 1995:702; Marshall, 1994:998). Remarkably, Jesus, by the parable, alongside other media in the Bible, identified Love (for God and neighbour) and Mercy as the most significant, in Christian ethics. It is the person who does as this Samaritan, who loves God as well as loves his neighbour as himself/herself, that is qualified for eternal life. More so, it is the person who regards the wellbeing of another, shows mercy, and renders help to another when the need arises, that loves his/her neighbour.

4. Recommendations

The following are recommended as ways forward:

- Nigerians should know that the value of and respect for human life surpasses every other considerations. It is never acceptable to neglect a helpless accident victim when it is obvious that it is only a charitable intervention that can restore his/her wellbeing.
- There is need for the Police’s apt response to their alleged discouragement of people’s aiding of accident victims. If they must arrest and interrogate the helper, then it should be done without embarrassments, but gently and appropriately.
- The directly concerned authorities (examples the Nigeria Police Force and the Federal Road Safety Commission of Nigeria) should encourage this charity among Nigerians, through proper and wide information. This may be through the mass media. This will not only promote the prospects of accident victims, but also show these authorities’ cognizance of the significance of such charitable assistance and their appreciation.
- The medical service providers can also significantly improve the prospects of accident victims, and encourage further interventions from people, by their approach to the treatment of accident victims. Instead of requesting a police approval before some treatments, let the service be rendered because of the urgency, and reports made later. This will not only increase the prospects of the victim, but will serve as an approval of the helper’s or conveyor’s kindness.

5. Conclusion

It is obvious that apathy towards accident victims is becoming a common culture in Nigeria, with the potency to cause more harm than good to the society. It was observed that even when some Nigerians were aware of the ultimate value of human life, they were discouraged from charitable interventions in accident scenes by factors which they said continue to exist in the country. These include Nigeria police harassment, financial factors/medical logistics, and criminal camouflage. While some were discouraged from aiding accident victims, by their experience with the Police, when they formerly tried to help; some others were happy to have not had any similar experience, and then prevent their experience of such, by simply neglecting accident victims. Similarly, while some were discouraged by other factors as the arduous rescue process, the monetary involvements in the rescue, and the resultant stress; others who feared criminal camouflage neglected accident victims to avoid being victims of criminality. Some of these people did empathize with the victims, but they could not manifest this empathy and mercy because of the above factors.

These factors were, however, found not to be enough to justify the uncharitable neglect of helpless accident victims, as implied in the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan. Evident in the parable is the supremacy of the ethic of love for God, and then for one’s neighbour, not just a fellow, but a fellow who needs aid. Remarkably, the parable of the good Samaritan places love and mercy above every other consideration, including the esteemed Jewish Law, which prevented its observers from being neighbours to the helpless man. Similarly, Nigerians should place love and mercy, irrespective of the socio-economic challenges, above every

other consideration in their day to day activities, especially with respect to accident/disaster victims. It is therefore that Nigerian who tries to help accident victims, despite the discouraging factors that is worthy of applauds. It is his/her attitude alone that will be of great benefit to an accident victim, his/her family, and the society to which he/she belongs.

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