

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCHES IN THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Corruption is a universal phenomenon. Nigerian society is highly flooded with corrupt practices that are presented in different forms such as bribery, extortion, fraud, nepotism, theft, kickbacks and illegal awarding of contracts, to mention but a few. Nigeria has been at the forefront of the most corrupt nations in the world. Previous studies on corruption in Nigeria have not exhausted the search for possible solutions from the ethical standpoint of Christianity. The qualitative research method was adopted, while the collection of data was through secondary sources and internet materials. The Federal Government's efforts at combating the menace of corruption through the establishment of anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) have not yielded much result. Hence, this paper argues that contemporary churches have a responsibility towards stopping corruption in the country, if not totally, at least to some manageable extent. Therefore, aside from prayer and fasting, preaching and teaching against corruption which is customary to contemporary churches, Moral education and awareness, Advocacy and accountability, Support for anti-corruption initiatives and promoting ethical leadership are some of the ethical responsibilities of the church suggested to facilitate the bringing back of sanity to the country from all forms of corrupt practices that have bedevilled Nigeria. However, it is recommended that all hands should be on deck in the church to sanitize the country of all forms of corruption because the church is supposed to be the custodian of moral values in society.

Keywords: Corruption, Ethical, Responsibilities, Church and Nigeria

Introduction

According to Adigun, Nigerian society is highly flooded with corrupt practices that are presented in different forms such as bribery, extortion, fraud, nepotism, theft, kickbacks

and illegal awarding of contracts, to mention a few.¹ In most of the surveys carried out on corrupt nations by Transparency International, an anti-corruption watchdog organization with headquarters in Berlin, Germany, Nigeria has been at the forefront of most corrupt nations in the world.² Corroborating Adigun, G. O. Adeleke and A. K. Oladipupo put forward that corruption in Nigeria is a result of a lack of social morality and excessive emphasis on wealth acquisition which makes many Nigerians hold materialism in high esteem without giving preference and undermining honest practices.³ It has also been observed that the major causes of corruption in Nigeria are lack of public accountability, greed, poverty and unemployment, and these have resulted in neglect of vital social services which has compounded the problem of the nation.⁴

The Federal Government's efforts at combating the menace of corruption through the establishment of anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) have not yielded much result.⁵ Hence, this paper examines the ethical responsibilities of the church towards combating the menace of corruption in Nigeria, because the church is saddled with the responsibility of being the custodian and propagator of morality in the society. Corruption, in the form of bribery, embezzlement and misappropriation must not be the stock of trade in Nigeria.⁶ Therefore, this paper attempts to define corruption conceptually in line with other related concepts, corruption in Nigeria, biblical stance on corruption, corruption in contemporary churches, and ethical responsibilities of the church in combating corruption in contemporary Nigeria.

Operational Definition of Corruption and Contemporary Churches

It is not an easy task to provide an acceptable definition for corruption owing to its multifaceted nature. In some cases, some things are referred to as corruption but cannot be

¹M. S. Adigun, and A. B. Akinloye, "Corruption and National Development: Nigeria as a case study" in Adebayo, A. A. (ed.) *Ethical Values and Challenges for National Development in Nigeria*, Epe School of Arts and Social Sciences, 2008, 123.

²Transparency International, Politics and government: Nigeria's corruption challenge, https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/nigerias_corruption_challenge, 28 May 2015

³G. O. Adeleke, and A. K. Oladipupo, "Corruption as an Impediment to Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Religion as a potent Panacea" in M. A. Adesewo (ed) *Religion and Sustainable Development. National Association for the Study of Religion and Education the Study of Religions and Education (NASRED)*, 2010, 250.

⁴Oyinola Oluwagmamiga Ayobami, 2011, "Corruption Eradication in Nigeria: An Appraisal", <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/ayobami.htm>. 2011

⁵Corruption in Nigeria: Review, Causes, Effects and Solutions <https://soapboxie.com/world-politics/Corruption-in-Nigeria>, Accessed on April 2, 2017

⁶Z. O. Ogunwole, "Corruption, Christian Churches and Sustainable Development in Nigeria" in M. A. Adesewo (ed) *Religion and Sustainable Development. National Association for the Study of Religion and Education the Study of Religions and Education (NASRED)*, 2010, 671

classified as such. Therefore, there is a need to articulate some of the commonly used definitions before giving an operational definition as conceptualised in this paper.

Ayegboyin defines corruption as all forms of bribery, unwanted exercise of power, intentional neglect of a recognized duty and all forms of favour done with the motive of gaining some advantages.⁷ Obasanjo also defines corruption as a form of dishonest or unethical conduct by a person or group of persons entrusted with a position of authority or an activity which involves financial or any other resources, outside his or her own, often to acquire personal or group benefits.⁸ He asserts that; ‘corruption is also the misuse of a public office or a position of authority and responsibility for private material or social gain at the expense of other people, individual or corporate.’⁹ These include bribery, nepotism and misappropriation of public resources. Kunhiyop on his part defines it as making someone morally corrupt.¹⁰ President Muhammadu Buhari, in the words of Obasanjo, defines corruption as the greatest form of human rights violation.¹¹ No matter how they look at it, the act of corrupting or state of being corrupt is a moral perversion or perversion of integrity that involves dishonest proceedings.

Ayegboyin variously grouped corruption into bribery, auto-corruption, investive corruption, supportive corruption, defensive corruption and other common ones like extortive, nepotistic and transactive corruption,¹² while Obasanjo grouped corruption into political, financial, ethnic and personal types.¹³ However, no matter the grouping, the fact remains that the world and the church are afflicted with a great number of corrupt practices.¹⁴

Corruption, aside from the fact that it runs contrary to the duty of Christians to promote holiness and righteousness in the world, is also an affront to human dignity and an assault

⁷D. Ayegboyin, “Corruption, an Obstacle to National Rebirth: The Religious Perspective”, *Orita Journal of Religious Studies*, xxxiii/1-2 June & December 2001, 116

⁸O. Obasanjo, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/228306-nigerian-churches-encouraging-corruption-obasanjo.html>

⁹O. Obasanjo, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/228306-nigerian-churches-encouraging-corruption-obasanjo.html>

¹⁰S. W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, Kenya: World Alive Publishers, 2008, 165

¹¹O. Obasanjo, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/228306-nigerian-churches-encouraging-corruption-obasanjo.html>

¹²D. Ayegboyin, “Corruption, an Obstacle to National Rebirth: The Religious Perspective”, *Orita Journal of Religious Studies*, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, xxxiii/1-2 June & December 2001, pg 116

¹³O. Obasanjo, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/228306-nigerian-churches-encouraging-corruption-obasanjo.html>

¹⁴N. Shields, *Christian Ethics*, Bukuru, Plateau State: African Christian Textbooks (ACTS), 2004, pg. 183

on the human conscience.¹⁵ Therefore, concerning other definitions, it is used in this paper as an act of using a position of trust for dishonest gain and moral perversion.

Corruption in Nigeria

According to Obasanjo, corruption in Nigeria as stated by the ICPC Act (Section 2), includes vices like bribery, fraud and other related offences which include illegal award of contracts, unjust promotion of staff, wrong dispensation of justices, misuse of public offices, embezzlement of public funds, inclusion of non-existent workers in the payroll otherwise known as ghost workers, amongst other numerous offences.¹⁶ In essence, the dishonest and illegal acquisition of wealth by the people for self-aggrandizement is corruption. Obasanjo further asserts that historical presentations have shown that corruption has been in place in Nigeria for decades and that in 2015/16, Nigeria was ranked 144th out of 146 corrupt nations by the perception index of Transparency International. While some patriotic Nigerians may want to contest this verdict on many grounds, it is a known fact that corruption is so endemic in Nigerian society that it has been hindering the growth of the nation's socio-economic and political system.¹⁷

The act of corruption is spreading so fast, covering almost every sector of the country. Citizens have also been found to be bribing their ways to be promoted within the civil service. As Obasanjo rightly observes, lots of shreds of evidence abound that female members of staff enjoy unqualified rapid promotion in many offices and organizations, particularly within the government's Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) at the expense of their more qualified male counterparts.¹⁸ Ayegboyin opines that corruption, as it were, is not limited to the public sector, but humanitarian society, professional services, financial and insurance industries are equally affected.¹⁹

In 2012, Nigeria was estimated to have lost over four hundred billion dollars (\$400 billion) to corruption since independence.²⁰ The increase in corrupt practices in the country has been linked to two major factors, namely; the rise of public administration

¹⁵G. Ehusani, Religion and Corruption in Nigeria, <http://www.georgeehusani.org/home/index.php/papers-and-essays/232-religion-and-corruption-in-nigeria>. Accessed in Nov. 2017

¹⁶O, Obasanjo, How Nigerian churches are encouraging corruption, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/228306-nigerian-churches-encouraging-corruption-obasanjo.html>. Accessed in Dec. 2017

¹⁷G. Ehusani, Religion and Corruption in Nigeria, <http://www.georgeehusani.org/home/index.php/papers-and-essays/232-religion-and-corruption-in-nigeria>. Accessed in Nov. 2017

¹⁸O, Obasanjo, How Nigerian churches are encouraging corruption, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/228306-nigerian-churches-encouraging-corruption-obasanjo.html>. Accessed in Dec. 2017

¹⁹D. Ayegboin, "Corruption, an Obstacle to National Rebirth: The Religious Perspective", in *Orita Journal of Religious Studies*, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, xxxiii/1-2 June & December 2001, 116

²⁰O. Ezekwesili, 2012, Nigeria loses \$400bn to oil thieves –<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/08/nigeria-loses-400bn-to-oil-thieves-ezekwesili/>

and the discovery of oil and natural gas. The government has tried to combat corruption through the enactment of legislation and enforcement of integrity systems, but all to no avail. Legislations alone are not sufficient as they are often breached by those who make them and those saddled with the responsibility of enforcing them.²¹

According to Ogunwole, some sectors in Nigeria are filled with corrupt practices of all kinds such as financial, sexual and political corruption.²² Some leaders steal, embezzle or misappropriate stupendous amounts of funds kept in their care or collected in the course of discharging their duties, like money, donations and other financial contributions which they dishonestly spend without proper accountability.²³

It is also of note that the nation is enmeshed in sexual corruption which can be classified into adultery, fornication, prostitution and rape. The country is replete with sexual perversion. Some citizens have been caught committing adultery and fornication with one another several times.²⁴ Ayegboin corroborated this fact by saying that there is a huge manifestation of corruption in contemporary Nigeria and that people are known to embezzle funds and engage in financial mismanagement while some people have been found to engage in all forms of sexual corruption.²⁵

Political corruption is another form of corruption that is in vogue in Nigeria. People are employed or appointed to positions by their links to any influential leader. In the same vein, some citizens are being exploited in the sense that, their properties are forcefully acquired for their selfish gain. Charms, African traditional medicine and magical power are most times used by some con men to exploit the people. People are attended to with so-called evil powers in the name of helping them.²⁶

²¹O. Obasanjo, 2017, "The Role of the Church in the Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria" At the Convention of Victory Life Bible Church International Victory City, Abeokuta, Sat. April 8, 2017 <http://www.lawyard.ng/ex-president-olusegun-obasanjos-full-speech-on-the-role-of-the-church-in-fighting-corruption/>

²²Z. O. Ogunwole, "Corruption, Christian Churches and Sustainable Development in Nigeria" in M. A. Adesewo (ed) *Religion and Sustainable Development. National Association for the Study of Religion and Education the Study of Religions and Education (NASRED)*, 2010, 671

²³ M. Uzochukwu, *Corruption in Nigeria: Review, Causes, Effects and Solutions* <https://soapboxie.com/world-politics/Corruption-in-Nigeria>, retrieved on April 2, 2017

²⁴ M. Uzochukwu, *Corruption in Nigeria: Review, Causes, Effects and Solutions* <https://soapboxie.com/world-politics/Corruption-in-Nigeria>, retrieved on April 2, 2017

²⁵D. Ayegboin, "Corruption, an Obstacle to National Rebirth: The Religious Perspective", *Orita Journal of Religious Studies*, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, xxxiii/1-2 June & December 2001, 116

²⁶M. Uzochukwu, *Corruption in Nigeria: Review, Causes, Effects and Solutions* <https://soapboxie.com/world-politics/Corruption-in-Nigeria>, retrieved on April 2, 2017

All these corrupt attitudes and practices are caused by an insatiable quest for the acquisition of material things which have in a way distorted the ethical beliefs and doctrines of the country.²⁷

Biblical Perspective on Corruption

According to Kunhiyop, the Bible, in its entirety, condemns corruption in every form.²⁸ Shields asserts that the Bible has always condemned bribery as out of harmony with the will of God²⁹(Prov. 15:27; 29:4; Micah 3:11) For example in the Old Testament, people were warned not to accept bribes, because it blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous”(Exo. 23:8; Deut. 16:18-20; 10:16-18).

Extortion was condemned outright in Ecclesiastes 7:7; Psalms 62:10; Isaiah 33:15 and Jeremiah 22:17. Other forms of corruption that were condemned include the use of dishonest scales to defraud purchasers (Hos. 12:7; Amos 8:5), cheating one’s neighbours of what is rightfully theirs (Lev. 6:2) and the type of abuse of the courts that led to Naboth’s wrongful conviction and death and the king’s seizure of his vineyard (I Kgs. 21).

The New Testament also speaks against corruption in form of bribery among people that were highly placed in the society. For example, in Luke 22:3-5, Judas Iscariot was bribed to betray Jesus and in Matthew 28:11-15, the chief priests bribed guards at the tomb of Jesus to lie against Jesus’ resurrection. In the same vein, Acts 24:26 recounts the account of how Governor Felix stylishly demanded for bribe to set Paul free from prison. Isaiah 45:13 shows support for those who would involve in the right kind of act without demanding for a bribe. The existence of the act of bribery, however led the people to assume that everything was for sale. Thus, a man called Simon offered money to Peter to buy the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter strongly condemned his action (Acts 8:18-24). Therefore, all Christians are admonished to shun any form of bribery, because, it violates the basic biblical command that we are to be holy as God is holy (Lev. 19:2; Matt. 5:48).³⁰

²⁷F. A. Akinseye, “Religion, Corruption, Transparency and Sustainable Development”, The book of Reading and Sustainable Development, *The National Association for The Study of Religions and Education (NASRED)*, 2010, 635

²⁸S. W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, Kenya: World Alive Publishers, 2008, 175

²⁹N. Shields, *Christian Ethics*, Bukuru, Nigeria: African Christian Textbooks, 2004, 185

³⁰Z. O. Ogunwale, “Corruption, Christian Churches and Sustainable Development in M. A. Adesewo (ed) *Religion and Sustainable Development. National Association for the Study of Religion and Education the Study of Religions and Education (NASRED)*, 2010, 668

Corruption in Nigeria and Ethical Responsibilities of the Church in Search for Solutions

One of the key stakeholders in the fight against corruption is the church. As a religious institution with a significant influence on the population, the church has a moral and ethical responsibility to address corruption and promote a culture of transparency, accountability, and integrity. Aside from the fact the Church is to pray for the transformation of people's hearts and to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.³¹ The church can play a critical role in the following ways:

Firstly, Moral education and awareness: The church should educate her members and the wider society about the ethical implications of corruption and its detrimental effects on society. By raising awareness and promoting a culture of honesty and integrity, the church can help combat corruption at the grassroots level. The pulpit should also be used to preach and teach against corruption in the society. According to Adelaja, our value system comes from our pulpit, religious beliefs, religious practices and educational system.³²

Secondly, Advocacy and accountability: The church could use its moral authority to advocate for better governance and accountability from the government and other institutions. By speaking out against corrupt practices and demanding transparency and accountability, the church can help create pressure for change and reform.³³

Moreover, support for anti-corruption initiatives: The church could support and collaborate with other organizations and initiatives that are working to combat corruption in Nigeria. By partnering with civil society organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders, the church can contribute to a collective effort to tackle corruption effectively.

Lastly, promoting ethical leadership: The church should promote ethical leadership among its members and in society at large. By emphasizing the importance of integrity, honesty, and servant leadership, the church can help create a new generation of leaders who are committed to fighting corruption and promoting the common good. Pastors and Christian leaders should be role models to others. They should live exemplary lives. Kunhiyop opines that honesty, competency and hard work must be acknowledged and rewarded in churches.³⁴

In all, corruption is a complex and pervasive problem in Nigeria that requires a multi-faceted approach to address effectively. The church has a crucial role to play in promoting

³¹S. W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, Kenya: WorldAlive Publishers, 2008, 171

³² S. Adelaja, *How Nigerian Pastors Breed Corruption in Nigeria!* <http://sundayadelajablog.com/how-nigerian-pastors-breed-corruption-in-nigeria/> 2017. Accessed 26, June 2016

³³S. W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, Kenya: WorldAlive Publishers, 2008, 172

³⁴S. W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, Kenya: WorldAlive Publishers, 2008, 174

ethical values, advocating for accountability, and supporting anti-corruption initiatives. By fulfilling its ethical responsibilities, the church can contribute to the fight against corruption and help build a more just and prosperous society for all Nigerians.

Conclusion

Generally, the objective of the church as light of the world is to discard the cloud of corruption which has engulfed the nation. Corruption has been facilitated and advanced in the contemporary Nigeria. Though the church has been of tremendous significance to the nation in numerous ways like organising adult literacy drive, constructing primary and secondary schools together with tertiary institutions, helping with public health enlightenment against HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, and at the same time, the church must foster moral discipline and ethical vigor to lead a corrupt independent era. Ethical values, like self-denial, true modesty and contentment needed to fight corruption are formed in the church. In view of this, earnest prayer and fasting, preaching and teaching against corruption, pastors and Christian leaders being role models to others, discipline of erring church leaders and members, underscoring diligence and hard work are proposed to foster the bringing of the nation from all patterns of corrupt procedures that has plagued Nigeria.

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