

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN COMBATING CORRUPTION IN THE PRESENT DAY NIGERIA

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Abstract

Corruption has been considered a structural problem in politics, economics and cultural milieu, in individual dealings as well as even in church circles. Corruption stands as a corrosive influence on investments, economic growth and national development. It has permeated almost every facet of the Nigerian Society. It is also seen as a worldwide phenomenon which has long been with every society in the world. What then is corruption? How has it caused underdevelopment in Nigeria and in other parts of the world? What does the Church need to do to address this ugly malaise that is crippling the growth and development of a number of societies? It is the argument of this paper that corruption has indeed caused a lot of problems that are stagnating Nigeria's path to greatness. The pitfalls of corruption include the following; high unemployment rates, widespread poverty, insecurity, religious intolerance, moral degeneration, banditry, etc. This paper explores Analysis as a method to discuss the role of the Church in combating the cankerworm of corruption in Nigeria. This is hinged on the argument that the Church by its very nature is saddled with the responsibility and duty to train and nurture individuals towards being good individuals through her moral teachings.

Keywords: Church, Corruption, Nigeria, National, Development

Introduction

It is a known fact that the prevalence of corruption cuts across almost every strata of the society. It is considered to be a structural problem in politics, economics or as a cultural and individual moral problem. It stands as a corrosive influence on investment and economic growth. Its effects are noticeable in different facets of the society. When talking about corruption, one cannot in fairness attribute it only to those who work in the economic sector or to those in the civil service; the church even as a religious institution is not totally immune to it. So it can be said the tentacles

of corruption are deep and widespread. It is by far, the most single canker worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society today. It is obvious that the Nigerian society is presently characterized by a number of social malaise such as insecurity, poverty, unemployment, religious intolerance, arm robbery, moral degeneration, and lack of accountability by those entrusted with leadership or governance.

Furthermore, corruption is a term that has been perceived in various ways by various scholars. It is therefore, seen as a worldwide phenomenon which has long been with every society in the world. It has been identified as the bane of most political and economic problems in Nigeria. Corruption has assumed a normal pattern of life in Nigeria. This work focuses on the role of the Church in combating corruption in the present day Nigeria. It is a known fact that the Church has a role to play in the wellbeing of the country. It is also part of the duties of the Church to ensure that the spiritual and social needs of its members are ensured. The Church is expected to set an example in the society, so it is incumbent on her to lead the fight against corruption. Bearing in mind that the hallmark of problems in Nigeria is corruption, high expectations are placed on the Church in the fight against corruption. The question becomes, has the Church been able to meet with or fulfill these expectations?

What Does Corruption Mean?

Corruption originally comes from the Latin word - *corruptio*- which means to decompose and to disintegrate. According to BBC English dictionary, “corruption is dishonesty and illegal behavior by people in position of authority or power, dishonestly to one's advantage especially for financial or monetary acquisition”. To support this, Okere T. writes: “all actions that corrode, disrupt or destroy integrity, all action that breaches the principle of *egbebereugobere* – that is corruption. For Egbucha, “corruption as a non – violent crime, usually involves cheating, dishonesty and betrayal of trust in commercial and governmental matters.” This vice called corruption is infectious. Indeed, it has infected Nigerian Christians, Muslims and pagans as well. Corruption is a crime against humanity. It has crippled many nations' flow of growth especially in Nigeria.

According to Ugorji L., “corruption debases democracy and it does this when it sacrifices merit, enthrones mediocrity and fosters injustice in various sectors of public affairs.” Okere T went further to say that:

We speak of bribery and corruption. Bribery is defined as the act or practice of taking or giving rewards for corrupt practices or giving or taking rewards for services otherwise paid for or to unduly influence the course of an action.

Rewards come in the form of money or in kind. Corruption means all these and then more.

He further enumerated the following as the meaning of corruption:

- a. Corruption stands not only for rooting but also for pollution, not only for *ihere ere* but also for *ihearu*. When the master wrestler is withdrawn from a wrestling match because the opposing side seduced him with a woman, his integrity has been breached, his power evaporated. He has been bought, and he is polluted. He is now corrupt.
- b. When a university student goes to sit for the JAMB exam on behalf of a lazy unfit secondary school candidate and enables him to win admission, this is corruption.
- c. Corruption also includes the bureaucratic varieties associated with the civil service, the police, and the judiciary.

Most Rev. Dr. P. Ezeokafor, while speaking on corruption opines that the situation of people sitting tight in office and denying the youths the opportunity to earn a living is corruption of the highest order. That, one of the highest corruptions in the country is that some people are sitting in power even when they have expired and have nothing to add again. These people have taken their positions, their children and those of their grandchildren.⁵

Causes of Corruption

It is quite obvious that many things cause corruption in Nigeria. Some are from the government, societal forces, and the evil in individuals. Talking about this, Okere outlined the major eight things that cause corruption as:

1. When a society refuses to recognize merit and prefers to compromise the 7th commandment.
2. When people become lazy to work and to really earn what they want (*igbambo*)
3. When material wealth becomes the only value admired by the rich and the poor.
4. When people get much more than they can afford or they deserve or are prepared to work for.
5. When ambition and greed push men to have more than their due or seem to be more than they are, generally refusing to accept their limitations.
6. When people are comfortable, living a lie, enjoying a false status and trying to finance such a false status.
7. When there is a general acceptance or tolerance of the 419s who arrogantly flaunt their stolen money. Those who live beyond their means, public officers whose net worth is far in excess of their legitimate earnings. When the law is silent, or riddled with loopholes.

8. When governments deliberately favor or disfavor sections of the populace, then corruption, gross corruption is the inevitable result.

Some writers have positions about the different potential causes of corruption in Nigeria. For many people, it is greed and ostentatious lifestyle. This is because any society that is in love with ostentatious lifestyle may delve into corrupt practices to feed the lifestyle. Secondly, a political environment that includes favours towards elites or wealthy citizens may also be influenced by corruption.

Forms of Corruption

The various forms of corruption includes: political corruption, educational corruption and religious corruption.

Political Corruption

This happens when an elected officer who lacks integrity or honesty uses his or her office or position for personal or ethnic gains. In Nigeria, political corruption exists through the following means; bribery, subversion of the people's mandate through election rigging, too much concentration of power, etc. The major problem here is that in Nigeria, the political class controls virtually every aspect of decision making including the economy. Our problem in Nigeria is that nobody does anything without expecting something in return. What is being practiced is what I call *ononuburu* (the winner takes it all). If elected office holders are answerable to the electorate, the fear of not being re-elected due to non- performance or underperformance or *ononuburu* would make those elected officials to perform in order to earn the trust and respect of the electorate. If the people's will is subverted, the main tenet of democracy is destroyed and when this happens, the elected officials will no longer be accountable to the electorate.

Educational Corruption

It is understood that when corruption becomes institutionalized in Nigeria, the funding of education in Nigeria's educational system is seen as a privilege and no more a right for the citizens. The amount of money that a prospective student is required to pay for admission to a university depends on the type of course the student wants. Any student who desires to become a medical doctor or to read any of the professional courses will be charged more than other students who want to study any of the liberal arts. Does this portray good educational system in Nigeria? This exactly means that in some cases, the best and brightest students would not be given admission because they cannot afford to come up with enormous amounts required from them. In Nigeria, everybody loses, the student would not get admission because he/she does not have the money to pay and the economy loses because it is deprived of the services of the best. What about a situation where the students are expected to "sort" for the paper they take, in cash or kind?

Religious Corruption

It is a fact that all that religion upholds is the highest level of integrity, dignity, morality and all forms of virtue. Secondly, a religion is opposed to corruption which is all about deceit, dishonesty and fraud. The question is, what happens today with all the religions in our country? Do religious leaders of this era thoroughly uphold the teachings of the founders of their faiths? Religion is supposed to be the ideal model for all men, unfortunately materialism, which is the root of corruption, has tainted the ideals of religious leaders. Some of them no longer preach that “vanity upon vanity, all is vanity” They rather preach about prosperity, affluence and miracles. Some even preach hatred for other religious and their members. God warned *ab initio* against corruption through the Holy Scriptures. In Exodus 23:8, it reads, “do not accept bribe for a bribe blinds those who see and twist the words of the righteous” Secondly, Job 36:18 reads “be careful that no one entices you by riches, do not let a large bribe turn you aside.” Thirdly, Proverb 17:23, reads “a wicked man accepts bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice” Fourthly, Ecclesiastes 7:7, reads “extortion turns a wise man into a fool and a bribe corrupts the heart.” Finally, Deuteronomy 27:25 reads “cursed is the man who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person.” It is well understood that the Church is called to witness to the truth and to carry out the task of evangelization. But it has been well observed that corruption has unfortunately as well infected the Church. The Church should not be afraid in proclaiming the truth at all times. Supporting this view, Odey Posits: There are some of whose mouth can only be shut up by their guns but be assured that they may kill us if they like. But they have no power to kill any truth we can muster the courage to tell them. Truth is indestructible”

In this present era, the Pentecostal Pastors seem to exploit and impoverish their followers, most especially the down trodden. To reiterate this assertion, Austin Echema echoes:

The Pentecostals are more sophisticated in their use of the Bible, handkerchief, olive oil, apron, etc. in some healing centers; the clients take some of these elements home and are told to dip them like the Handkerchief into their water used for drinking, Cooking, and bathing. Some Catholic Priest-healers have more recently introduced new phenomena into their healing methods.

He continues,

Some, known as 'family priest' (*Fadaezinaulo*), bury crucifixes, bag of salt, live animals in the ground, perform nocturnal rituals at riversides or grave yards, make sacrifices to pacify dead angry ancestors, encourage second

burials, celebrate what they call black mass at midnight with colored and specified numbers of candles. These practices appear superstitious and remain one of the old African traditional religions.

Speaking further on this, Okere posits the following:

1. In the diocese, bishops and priests have a master-servant relationship with flattery sycophancy and adulation of bishops' galore, since they are vested with absolute powers over everything; absolute powers, that itself, also corrupt absolutely.
2. When a bishop transfers a priest to an unviable/difficulty parish (mmi atta, ebenebe) in order to punish him or to a rich township parish in order to silence his critical voice or in order to reward him for his loyalty, there is high level, wicked rotten corruption, especially when the Holy spirit is invoked to justify these pathetic maneuvers.

The Fight Against Corruption In Nigeria

Power misuse and abuse both in the military regimes and the succeeding democracy has made the ICPC and EFCC a toothless bulldog, a veritable tool for political witch-hunting other than an instrument for the eradication of corruption. The Nigerian polity has so degenerated that every government in power employs instruments of government for fighting both real and imaginary enemies. The agencies vested with the power to fight corruption in Nigeria lack the goodwill and sincerity of purpose hence, some corrupt government officials are treated with kid gloves while others walk away freely and shoulder high. Accountability in most government agencies including the crime fighters is a far cry, a herculean task that no head of such agencies has ever accomplished. While huge amounts of money and properties running into billions are recovered almost on daily basis, greater percentages of those monies are never accounted for.

It is also needless to say that those convicted so far, especially by this current dispensation are political opposition figures or those considered capable of becoming a political threat. The arraignment and conviction of Senator Orji Uzor Kalu is one of many instances. This, however, does not mean he is corrupt-free. The EFCC till date still lacks the will to question Asiwaju Tinubu about the two bullion vans that entered his residence on the eve of the 2019 elections neither have they investigated Gov. Ganduje of Kano so far even with the video coverage of the sordid deal that exposed him.

Negative Effects of Corruption

Nepotism

In Nigeria, often times one has to know somebody in authority to influence employment decision before one gets employed, especially into lucrative jobs. This type of action breeds incompetence and hostile work environment. Most of these individuals come into the work environment with chips on their shoulders and find it difficult to play by the rules.

Cronyism

Cronyism is the appointment of a friend or a relative to a position of trust regardless of whether or not the person is qualified. It has been alleged that some openings are left unfilled until the friends or relatives of the friends of those responsible for the hiring are available. Some vacancies are left open for friends and children who are still in college. If Nigeria is to advance economically, this type of practice must be abolished and vacant positions must be open to competition and the best candidates hired for the jobs. This practice, together with nepotism, is partially responsible for the brain-drain that is happening in Nigeria.

Mediocrity

Nepotism and cronyism breed mediocrity. Nigerian leaders must open their eyes and see the harm that nepotism, cronyism and mediocrity are doing to the economy. Productivity is sacrificed on the altar of inefficiency. If Nigerian leaders want Nigerians to be patriotic, the way they do things must change, otherwise no amount of slogan or re-branding will make people patriotic. A nation is like a family. If your children watch you as parents waste the resources that are meant for their upbringing and you turn around to preach to them the virtue of being resourceful, your children will look at you and wonder if you are insane. Nigerian leaders must stop encouraging mediocrity by employing the best for the good of the economy. After all, if the economy grows, more people will benefit.

The Role of the Church in the Fight Against Corruption

The Church has the following roles to play in the fight against corruption:

1. Speaking against evil

It is the duty of the Church to the defenseless as well as the hope of the hopeless. In other words, the Church has the moral obligation to condemn the acts of bribery and corruption openly both within and outside its religious sphere. The Church should not condone bribery and corruption. Instead, such should be exposed and the perpetrators duly penalized by the society. The Church must therefore, spend herself to the utmost as a matter of urgency to cooperate with the government in fighting corruption.

2. Witness of Life through avoiding corrupt practices

The Church as a moral agent of the society should in herself avoid any form of scandal that will undermine her integrity in the society. The Church should as a matter of urgency flush out corrupt and undisciplined attitudes that will undermine the high standard expected of them. The Church should neither give nor receive bribe and should not encourage or engage in corrupt practices. This will make their voice and authority to be respected.

3. Disdaining corrupt people

The Church should not honor those whose integrity are questionable. If possible, money from shabby deals and corrupt practices should be rejected by the Church. This will make them have a rethink in their nefarious activities. The Church as the public defender of the people should not take part in the oppression of the citizens by sharing in the ill-gotten riches of corrupt people. They should as well not appreciate evil by awarding religious titles to people of questionable character; rather they should look to people who have served the church creditably.

4. Election of people of integrity

The Church should support and encourage the election of people of integrity in the position of trust. It should shun or avoid partisan politics and elect only those with clean records. They should not for the sake of sordid money tarnish their reputation as an institution of integrity. The Church therefore, should be at the forefront of ensuring that good and credible leaders are elected in the society through massive conscientisation of the populace.

5. Minimize financial pressure on people

The Church should as a matter of urgency strive to curb all forms of “economic centre” syndrome. By this I mean to say that the Church should look into the growing trend of “prayer for money” miracle centers. One cannot bear the deception with prayer that has befallen the Church via the influx of Pentecostalism. The ideals of the Church are being misinterpreted to soothe an ignorant populace. This is a grievous and very serious form of religious corruption which should be nipped from its bud. Church leaders are therefore, required to emphasize as well as enforce the ideal indoctrination of people as Christians by Priests and Church teachers. This will ensure that the longing quest for material possessions is controlled.

6. Teaching the right thing (The Good news of Christ)

The Church is to teach the demands of justice for individuals as well as the society in general. The Church leaders are to teach the values of the gospel such as; human dignity, universal solidarity, brotherly love and universal distribution of worldly goods. These teachings should portray the selfless service Christ showed during his

earthly ministry. Church leaders should not be selective in the proclamation of the truth.

7. Catching them young

In this jet-age, the culture of the society has transformed from what it has been some ages back. The methodology of teaching the gospel as well should be transformed, upgraded and modified to serve the test of time. This refers to the present age, the age of advanced technology which is seriously enshrined in secularism. Our youths should as a matter of urgency be the priority of the Church. The Church should strive to bring the children as well as youths closer to the Church and give them proper catechesis and spiritual directions. Youths should be encouraged to shun the concept of the easy life mentality and laziness. This will enable them learn the true values of being Christians.

8. Option for the poor

The Church should help in reducing the suffering of the poor, protect their fundamental human rights, cater for them and provide for their basic needs. The poor are the victims of a corrupt society. The Church should encourage and support them. They should also encourage the rich and people in government to reserve great interest in the welfare of the poor. If not done, such people are prone to corrupt deals and deeds.

9. Payment of Just wage to workers

Among other reasons why public workers and civil servants engage in corrupt practices and bribery is poor remuneration. What they receive sometimes is not equal to their input. This is commonly found in establishments owned and managed by the Church. Something has to be done to improve the lot of Church workers by ensuring that just wages and salaries are paid as at, when due.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The Family

It is a well-known fact that the first school for children is their homes. Therefore, parents should teach their children moral values. They should also put more time and strength in the upbringing of their children. Parents should teach their children about moral values at tender age. This is because it is better to teach them what is good at an early stage so that these teachings will remain with them throughout their lives. The Catechism of the Catholic Church notes that, “the family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God and make good use of freedom.”¹⁵

Educational System

Having seen the level of decay that has ravaged and is still ravaging all sectors of the education system, it is pertinent to say that government should as a matter of urgency declare a state of emergency in the sector.

They should as a matter of urgency see that class room blocks and other necessary facilities befitting of education environment are provided adequately. They should equally ensure that the right and qualified personnel are employed to ensure standard education from the nursery schools to the tertiary institutions.

The Government

Corruption can be fully attributed to the government officials. If government officials are honest, then corruption can be minimized or completely eradicated. They should understand that political office is for service. The high cost of electioneering has made it impossible to curb corrupt practices in Nigeria. Election therefore, cost even more than the cost of running a government.

Judiciary

To solve the problem of corruption in Nigeria, the judiciary together with the Legislature must first and foremost remove the Immunity Clause protecting government officials. They must endeavor to fight Executive Indiscipline. Okonkwo supports this statement when he said: “the judiciaries have obvious crises and role conflicts because of the political platforms of what I call Executive Indiscipline.”¹⁶ This means that nobody should be above the law and anybody who flouts the law or involves him/herself in corruption must be brought to book. The judiciary should be a respecter of no man or person. People should be responsible for their actions. Therefore, both the giver and the receiver of bribes must be punished. Corruption in the judiciary compromises the rule of law.

The Media

Having passed the Freedom of Information Bill into law, the media should be up and doing in their duties, as they are the watchdog of the society through the power of their pen. “The freedom of the press can help the judiciary fight corruption.” Journalists must endeavor to provide fair reportage. Media are watchdogs, agenda setters, and gatekeepers that can monitor the quality of governance, frame the discussion about corruption, and lend voice to a wide range of perspective and arguments.

Conclusion

Corruption has unfortunately permeated every sphere of Nigeria. This is enabled by the fact that there is no political will to end corruption in Nigeria. Both the leaders and the led have with open arms embraced corruption, weakening every aspect of the

nations. This accounts for the redundancy in progress and development of the country. There are, in Nigeria, several variables causing corruption. Such factors are greed, laziness, favoritism, inordinate quest for material things etc. Corruption breeds nepotism, cronyism, and mediocrity. However, where there is a will, there is definitely a way. The onus lies on the Church, the government, NGOs, families and individuals to shun corruption and once again make Nigeria great.

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