

THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, PhD

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State

ikee_mario@yahoo.com

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1977-202X

&

Basil Amarachi Okonkwo, PhD

Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State.

ba.okonkwo@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

One of the challenges that has remained consistent through the historical evolution of the Nigerian state, right from independence, is the menace of corruption. It has eaten and still eats every fabric of the life of the nation from the political, through the educational, health, economic, etc., life of the nation. This work seeks to expose the pervasiveness of corruption in the Nigerian society and give a more barring insight into the role the Church can play in reducing to the barest minimum, if not totally eradicating corruption in the present day Nigeria. It has the aim of providing solution to the problem of corruption from a religious perspective. This paper understands corruption as the act of weakening moral principle, integrity or virtue, for the sake of satisfying one's yearnings or desire. Humans are religious in nature. As corruption is rapidly finding its root into every fabric of the human society, this paper discovers that the church, which is a religious institution, can help eradicate corruption. For the purpose of this paper, the thematic and analytic methods of inquiry were employed.

Keywords: Church, Corruption, Nigeria Education, Nepotism, Cronyism, Government, Judiciary

Introduction

Corruption in Nigeria crosses social strata and remains a prominent canker worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society. Without doubt, it stands as a corrosive influence on investments and economic growth. It has permeated the Nigerian society and has been identified as the bane of most political and economic problems in Nigeria. It has, in fact, 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 promotion of the well-being of the nation. It is also the duty of the church to ensure that the spiritual and social needs of persons 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.

This paper holds that the church can fight against corruption through teaching the gospel values, the payment of a just wage to her workers, promoting the option for the poor, giving priority to the young in terms of teaching the right values, speaking against evil, a life of witnessing that teaching the right way, not promoting corrupt people through awards, promoting the election of people of integrity and minimizing financial pressure on the people of God. These notwithstanding, what is corruption?

Understanding Corruption

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 ones advantage especially for financial or monetary acquisition. To support this, Okere writes: “all actions that corrode disrupt or destroy integrity, all action that breaches the principal of *egbe bere, ugo bere* – that is corruption”¹. For Egbucha, “corruption as a non – violent crime, usually involves cheating, dishonesty and betrayal of trust in commercial and governmental matters.”²

According to Ugorji, “corruption debases democracy and it does this when it sacrifices merit, enthrones mediocrity and fosters injustice in various sectors of public affairs”.³ Okere further holds 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”.⁴ Ugorji further enumerates the following as different shades of the meaning of corruption:

- a. Corruption stands not only for rooting but also for pollution, not only for *itherere 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 gain admission, this is corruption.
- c. Corruption also includes the bureaucratic varieties associated with the civil service, the police, and the judiciary.

Bishop Ezeokafor, while speaking on corruption includes 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

Many things cause corruption in the Nigerian society. Okere outlines the major causes of corruption as follows:

1. When a society refuses to recognize merit;
2. When people become lazy to work;
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 people 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 parade of ill gotten wealth;
8. When governments deliberately favor or disfavor sections of the populace⁶

In the face of the above, Okere believes that corruption will be inevitable.

The Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria

Power misuse and abuse, both in the military regimes and the succeeding democracy, has made the ICPC and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) toothless bulldogs, veritable tools for political witch-hunting other than instruments 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, shoulder high. Accountability in all government agencies, including the crime fighter, is a far cry, a herculean task that no head of such agencies has ever accomplished. While huge amount of money and properties running in billions of naira (even in US dollars) are recovered almost on daily basis, greater percentages of these monies are never accounted for.

Soni Daniel of Vanguard newspaper reported, as at November, 2018, that the EFCC, in Ibrahim Magu's three years in office as the Acting Chairman, has recovered #871 billion looted funds with 703 convictions.⁷ However, there is a significant disparity between the reported figure and the report of subsequent years. As at December, 2019, Premium Times quoted Magu thus: "In the four years under my watch, we have recovered more than N794 billion and have ensured hundreds of properties forfeited to the government."⁸

The Acting Chairman of EFCC, Ibrahim Magu, was fingered in gross negligence of extant laws and due process resulting in the missing of recovered properties. Some of those properties are sold to close friends and allies while the proceeds are used to acquire properties abroad using the name of their proxies. Abisola Olasupo reported the disclosure by the chairman of the EFCC, Abdulrasheed Bawa. According to him, The Commission has so far recovered a total of \$153 million and 80 houses valued at 80 million from former Petroleum Minister, Diezani Alison-Madueke.⁹ The whereabouts of all these recoveries remains utopian while the government deepens the culture of borrowing from foreign countries, including IMF and World Bank.

It is also needless to say that those convicted so far, especially by this current dispensation are either members of the opposition or those considered to be potential political threats. The EFCC till date still lacks the will to question Asiwaju Tinubu regarding the two bullion vans that drove into his residence before the 2019 elections, neither have they investigated Governor Ganduje since the dollar saga. The EFCC has also failed to investigate other economic crimes such as the destruction of farms by herdsmen. It is not also news that every Nigerian youth has become a target for the EFCC and other agencies, coercing and extorting money from innocent and hardworking youths.

Negative Effects of Corruption

There are several negative effects of corruption on the Nigerian society. These include the following:

1. **Nepotism:** Nepotism is a practice among those who have power or influence of favoring relatives, friends, associates, especially as it pertains giving them jobs. Often times, one has to know somebody in authority to influence employment decision, especially into lucrative jobs in Nigeria. This 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.

2. **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. 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.

3. **Mediocrity:** Nepotism and cronyism breed mediocrity. Nigerian leaders need to 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.

The Role of the Church in the Fight Against Corruption

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

1. Speaking against Evil

It is the duty of the Church to speak for the defenseless as well as be 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 society. The Church should, therefore, spend herself to the utmost in cooperating with the government in the fight against corruption.

2. Witness of Life

The Church as a moral agent, should in herself, avoid any form of scandal that will undermine her integrity in the society and the high standard expected of her. It is the Church's witness of life that will make her voice and authority to be respected.

3. Not Promoting Corrupt People

The Church should not honour (through religious titles) those whose integrity is questionable. If possible, money from shabby deals and corrupt practices should be rejected by the Church. This will make corrupt donors 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.

4. Encourage the Election of People of Integrity

The Church should support and encourage the election of people of integrity into positions of trust. The Church can achieve this through massive conscientisation of the populace.

5. Minimize Financial Pressure on People

Financial pressures on people that would make them to engage in wrong dealings so as to pay off Church levies must be avoided by the Church. There is also the need to avoid programs that take advantage of the ignorance of the people for the sake of raising funds.

6. Teaching the Gospel Values

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.

8. Option for the Poor

The Church should help in reducing the suffering of the poor, protect their rights, cater for their basic needs. The poor are the victims of a corrupt society. The Church should encourage and support the poor and should encourage the rich and people in government to reserve great interest for the welfare of the poor.

9. Pioneering the Payment of a Just Wage

Among other reasons why public workers and civil servants engage in corrupt practices and bribery is underpayment. What they receive sometimes is not equal to their input. The church, within her own institutions need to champion the payment of just wages to the workers serving in her institutions.

Conclusion

Corruption has unfortunately permeated every sphere of Nigeria. This is enabled by the fact that there's in 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 nation's life. 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. Even though the government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), families and individuals have a responsibility to fight corruption and save the Nigerian state, the Church, because of her spiritual character, has a great responsibility and role in the fight against corruption. It is with this understanding that this paper proposes major pathways through which the Church can make her contribution to National development through the fight against corruption.

Recommendations

1. **The Family:** It is a well-known fact that the first school for children is the home. Therefore, parents should teach their children the right moral values. 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."¹⁰
2. **Educational System:** In the face of the decay that has ravaged the educational sector, it is necessary that children be taught about the evil in corruption and the need to avoid it. This should be taught from the earliest stage of their education.
3. **The Government:** Political officers and government workers should be made to understand that political office is for service and not for personal interest. This should sounded to them in different ways and at many times as possible¹¹.
4. **Judiciary:** The Judiciary must remove the Immunity Clause that protects corrupt government officials. Okonkwo avers that: "the judiciaries have obvious crises and role conflicts because of the political platforms of what I call Executive Indiscipline."¹² This means that nobody should be above the law and anybody who flouts the law or involves himself or herself in corruption must be brought to book.
5. **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. Journalist must endeavor to provide fair reportage and monitor the quality of governance,

frame the discussion about corruption, and lend voice to a wide range of perspectives and arguments.

Endnotes

1. Okere, T., *Church, Theology and Society in Africa*, (Enugu; Fowth Dimension Publishing Company), 2005, p.138.
2. Egbucha U.C., "Employing the concept of OfonaOgu in Igbo Tradition Religion as a Dynamic Partner of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in the Fight Against Corruption in South- Eastern Nigeria", *Amamihe Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 5 (2007).
3. Ugorji L., *Politics and Social Ethics: Issues of the moment*. Enugu Snaap press, 2008. p.75.
4. Okere, T., *ibid*, pp.137 – 138.
5. Onwumelu A., "Corruption: Bishop Ezeokafor Warns of Repeat of End SARS Protests," Accessed from <https://fidesnigeria.org/corruption-bishop-ezeokafor-warns-of-repeat-of-endsars-protests/>, on 19/08/2021.
6. Okere, *ibid*, p.140.
7. Daniel S., "EFCC recovers N871bn looted funds, 407 mansions in 3 years — Magu," Accessed from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/11/to-deepen-democracy-we-must-build-our-institutions-speaker-dogara/>, on 19/08/2021.
8. Agency Report, "EFCC recovers N794 billion, secures 1,900 convictions," Accessed from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/367452-efcc-recovers-n794-billion-secures-1900-convictions.html>, on 19/08/2021.
9. Agency Report, "EFCC: Magu failed to account for 332 recovered properties—Report," Accessed from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/402574-efcc-magu-failed-to-account-for-332-recovered-properties-report.html>, on 19/08/2021.
10. Olasupo A., "We recovered \$153 million, 80 houses from Diezani, says EFCC boss," Accessed from <https://m.guardian.ng/news/we-recovered-153-million-80-houses-from-diezani-says-efcc-boss/>, on 19/0/2021.
11. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2207, p.472.
12. Okonkwo J. I., "Ubi Societas Ubi Jus; The Role-Conflict of the Nigerian Judiciary in Nation Building", *Amamihe Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 5(date), pp. 199-200.