

Curbing the Menace of Corruption for Good Governance in Nigeria: The Role of the Church

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Abstract

Corruption has become a cancer in the life of nations and it seems to have defied all treatment. One major reason for this state of affairs is that these saddled with the responsibility of applying the medicine are not sincere in their diagnosis and in dispensing of the prescribed drugs Oladunjoye [1]. Corruption has been seen as a threat to development and it is actually a major cause of poverty and insecurity. They are twin sisters scourging underdeveloped countries; but corruption makes it difficult to overcome poverty and insecurity. We are currently living in the materialistic age. Prestige, honor and fame in most of Nigeria now depend on political positions and material possessions, and not on food character any longer. This paper has examined role of the church in curbing the menace of corruption for good governance in Nigeria. The work has adopted the agency, collective actions and rent-seeking theories to justify its claim. It has discussed the concepts of corruption and good governance and recommends church roles in the reduction of corruption to its barest minimum in order to pave way for good governance is generally characterized by accessibility, accountability, predictability and transparency which can only be achieved when the Church make converted efforts through leadership by example. It is only then that corruption, which has drawn back the wheel of progress in this nation, can be addressed.

Keywords: Church, Corruption, Curbing, Good Governance, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into every fabric of life in Nigeria and its contribution to the present level of insecurity and poverty in the country is immense. This is because the privileged few have used their positions to drain the resources that are supposed to go round in the form of provision of social amenities, like good drinking water, good road networks, stable power supply, qualitative education, as well as effective health services delivery among others. Therefore, an attempt is made to consider the issue of conceptually, the Nigeria experience and the expected role of the church in curbing corruption in order to enhance good governance.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

The phenomenon of corruption has been explained from different perspectives (Breif, Thomas & Lena). Among the various theories that explains it are, the agency, collective actions and rent-seeking theories all of which see it as calculation of its beliefs and cost. The agency theory, also called the helping hand or principal agent theory explains that "corruption arises when a benevolent principal delegates decision-making power to a non-benevolent agent who commits corruption" [2]. This is to say, "the principal

is unable to perfectly monitor the actions of the agents, and so the agent can pursue its interest and behave against the principal's will, including participation in a corrupt contract that damages the principal's utility" [3]. This has exclaimed certain instances in Nigeria when the leader, like the second republican president (Alhai Shehu Shagari) appeared willing but unable to stop the corrupt practices of his cabinet members.

The basic assumption that the principal is always willing to fight corruption is not valid in many context including Nigeria where most often, the leaders are themselves guilty of corruption [4]. Therefore, the agency theory is deemed to be grossly inadequate. The collective action theory has more or less remedied this inadequacy [5]. It views corruption as an act of not a few people but of other members of the system including the decision makers who decided to also engage in it or at least not actively oppose it. As Rothstein and Uslaner explained, members of a setting in which corruption is wide spread "participate in corrupt practices mostly because they perceive that most other agents play this game and that it thus makes little sense to be the only agent that acts honestly if one cannot trust others to be honest" [6]. In fact, in such systematically corrupt setting, honestly is somehow

considered a deviant behaviour [7]. It is on this ground that statement “If you cannot beat them join them” popularized in Nigeria as in most cases, both the decision makers and their agents brazenly engage in corrupt practices.

The rent-seeking theory, also called the grabbing hand approach explains that “corruption arises because non-benevolent government officials introduce inefficient policies to extract rents from the private sector” [2]. In other words, corruption manifest in the form of policies which serve only the interests of the lobbyist among the government officials at the expense of the masses (Khadan). This, has at different time

1.2. Conceptual Clarifications

Here, we are bend on clarifying two concepts: corruption and good governance.

What is Corruption?: Corruption is another term which is difficult to define due to its scope which is almost all encompassing and including everything negative in human conduct. Hence, it easier to describe rather than define corruption. As captured by Black Law Dictionary (1990), corruption is “an act done with intent to give advantage inconsistent with official duty and rights of others. The act of an official person who unlawfully and wrongfully uses his situation or character to procure some benefit for himself or for another person contrary to duty and the rights of others”. Ade opined that corruption is the acquisition of that to which one (as a member of a society not public officer alone) is not entitled [8]. According to Werlin (1973) describes corruption as the diversion of public resources to non-public purposes. In addition, corruption may be described as an abuse of privilege in varying forms geared towards conscripting public resources for private/personal gain.

Also, Bayley tied his perspective of corruption particularly to the act of bribery, is a general term covering the misuse of authority as a result of consideration of personal gain, which needs not be monetary [9]. Corruption is a universal phenomenon but modalities for tackling its challenges vary from society to society. It is the greatest evil that could befall any society or nation because it undermines any attempt to attain sufficiently and integrity in the policy. Worthy of note is the fact that corruption is a voluntary act by its perpetrators.

Olopeenia situates the concepts of corruption within the context of bargaining for political power as the product of an exchange relation in the process of a competitive power contest [10]. In his contribution, Olurode observes that corruption becomes endemic when the rising expectation is profound and many have become more money and materially conscious. Meanwhile, the political perspective on the mature and causes of corruption focuses on the concomitant effect of the failure of the state to fulfil the expectations and aspirations of the masses [11].

In Nigeria however, the character of the state and its principal actors’ general belief about the use of political office as the primary means of gaining access to wealth and

socio-economic status, in a hopelessly bad economy, account for the brutal and intense struggle for the control of political power. It has therefore, sustained corruption, particularly in high places. Although, corruption is embedded in the origin of Nigeria state, right from colonialism and corruption has been introduced to the geographical expression later christened Nigeria by the Missionaries who introduced Christianity and Western way of life so that they would be able to exploit the masses and their environment [12]. It is not surprising that briefly after political independence; corruption was matured and elevated to state virtue permeating the entire fabric of our national life (Olurode).

What is Good Governance?: Babawale pointed to the fact that, World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) refers to good governance as the exercise of political power to promote the public good or the welfare of the people [13]. Ndulo argues that good governance entails first and foremost, a government that lives up to its responsibilities by ensuring effective delivery of public goods and services, the maintenance of law and order, and the administration of justice [14]. Oke sees good governance as “the effective and efficient management of public affairs and resources by democratically elected leaders and their appointees” [11]. This definition recognizes the fact that democratically elected leaders and their appointees sometimes mismanage a country’s affairs and resources.

According to Alamu; walte; Akao and Dairo good governance has eight major or essential characteristics:

- It is Participatory: Participation by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation could either be direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society would be taken into consideration in decision making.
- Rule of law: Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force.
- Transparency: Transparency means the decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means the information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decision and their enforcement.
- Responsiveness: Good governance requires that institutions and process try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.
- Consensus Oriented: Good governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved.
- Equity and Inclusiveness: A society’s well-being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. This requires that all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.

- **Effectiveness and Efficiency:** Good governance means that process and institution produce result that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment (Okunoye).
- **Accountability:** Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders.

1.3. Multidimensional Nature of Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption is manifested in all spheres of our national life; from the political setting, the judiciary, religious institutions, economy and academic to sports.

Corruption comes in various forms, and the implication of this in Nigeria is mal-administration which has on many occasions led to electoral fraud, nepotism, cronyism, extortion, favoritism, bribery, Graff, embezzlement and double standard. Despite incessant domestic and international pressures to fight corruption, corruption continues to be nurtured by the Nigerian political whose concept of governance is typified by its our-turn-to-eat philosophy that has little or no regard for civil needs.

The severity of the bite of corruption is seen in all our infrastructures: The dilapidated National Electric Power Authority now Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) has for many years become compulsively erratic, causing serious discomfort to the economy. Successive governments have spent billions of naira on the power project yet with no positive result. Many have resorted to the use of generating set in recent times. NIPOST retains its age-long sluggish, unreliable and grossly insufficient delivery system. It is alleged that mails suspected to contain money; cheques or valuable materials are tampered with in transit. The railway and other social services have collapsed on account of official corruption [12].

Yusuf observed that it is common knowledge that the custom services, the Nigerian Immigration and the Nigeria Police are the three organs of government where corruption is the rule [15]. This made former President Olusegun Obasanjo to say that were it was possible to do away with the Nigeria Customs Services (NCS), he would have gladly done so. He was this statement in reaction to the level of corruption in the service, which is the second highest revenue earner for the country after oil and gas. Monumental corruption that has pervaded all arms of the military has shattered the myths of the barracks discipline.

According to Abidoye a reporter in Premium Times News, The Investigator also discovered how billions of naira were allegedly stolen by Mr. Emeziele and other officials from the CBN account including "fraudulent cash withdrawals of \$6.23 million" – about 2.9 Billion Naira at the then official exchange rate of N461 to a dollar [16]. The special investigator said his probe led him to 543.4 million pounds kept by Mr. Emeziele

manipulated the Naira exchange rate and perpetrated fraud in the e-naira project of the CBN.

African News report (15th, April, 2024) that the entity being probe for fraud is the Ministry of humanitarian affairs which is also charged with fighting poverty [17]. It said the fund has been recovered from former and suspended Ministry officials. Beta Edu, the minister of humanitarian affairs and poverty alleviation was suspended in January by President Bola Tinubu less than six-month after her appointment.

Omogbe states that the political setting in Nigeria is made of dishonest and fraudulent people whose main purpose of coming to government is to enrich themselves [18]. Embezzlement of public funds by those to whom the funds are entrusted deals with contractors handling government project with the resultant over-inflated contracts, ten percent "kickback" from contracts awarded, and other fraudulent practices by government officials are common features dotting our political life since independence. Naked greed, dishonesty and corruption have become "virtues" in our society. There are cases of politicians past and present who have in one way or the other embezzled money meant for the masses and still walk about on the street free with impunity.

In the religion setting, Ogedengbe reports that, all over the country and the world generally, "marketing" God is fast becoming a top market business [19]. The situation prevailing among men of God today is alarming. For instance, an evangelist was arrested in Ondo state for stealing musical instruments worth N3 million which he reportedly sold at the Alaba International Market Lagos. While begging for forgiveness, the evangelist claimed that it was the handwork of the devil.

Moreover, a visit to see a "man of God" for spiritual help has turned to money venture business, because the "victims" of such "men of God" use oratory skills and untold stories of miracles (to raise the morale of the victim) into believing that they are really men of God. They eventually trap the victim in the name of spiritual assistance [10].

In related development, the national president of the Scripture Union of Nigeria, then E.K. Adesokan, while addressing the press on the occasion of the centenary celebration of the Union in 1985, accused church leaders of polluting the religious atmosphere in the country. He said the churches have concerned themselves so much with material wealth that their energies are often directed at preserving their positions and titles rather than saving souls. While the paper is not condemning material blessings and healing that the religious leaders do to their clients, the shift in priority is its main.

Corruption in Nigeria affects citizens, especially the poor, very adversely, because they so much depend on the government and its institutions and partly because much of the stolen wealth is never kept and spent in the country. Adamolekun reports that it is estimated that about \$400 billion Nigeria's

oil wealth has been stolen much of it siphoned to overseas bank accounts. While the teeming population is wallowing in abject poverty [20].

1.4. Recommendations

This work, therefore recommends the following roles of the church in curbing the menace of corruption for good governance:

- The practice of the church in conferring honors and awards on personalities in appreciation of their contribution to the church or society should not be monetized. This will reduce corruption to the barest minimum and promote good moral among the people in government.
- Organizing anti-corruption crusade. The church can start the anti-corruption crusade by speaking the truth to its members as well as to government officials, rather than organizing regular 'prosperity crusade'. In addition, some church leaders who have turned themselves to be stooges or government should have a rethink in order not to rubbish their integrity.
- Apart from this, the church should as a matter of urgency fight corruption within by placing a premium primarily on attitude, moral social and spiritual that border on human integrity, chastity, honesty, sacrifice and perseverance.
- In addition, the church should no longer compromise its roles as social watchdogs by who camouflage as "friends of the masses". Rather, it should be aggressively involved in preaching against the maltreatment of the masses by the government.

2. Conclusion

What we have examined so far reveals that there can be no solution to Nigeria' multifaceted problems, unless the church takes the bull by the horn in their efforts to fight corruption to the barest minimum. There is the need for repentance and a change of heart on the part of the church which would automatically lead to a total transformation of the society at large. Therefore, good governance is generally characterized by accessibility, accountability, predictability, and transparency, can only be achieved when the church make concerted efforts through leadership by example. It is only then that corruption, which has drawn back the wheel of progress in this nation, can be addressed.

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