

## **CORRUPTION IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT: A HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines corruption and its effects in the Nigerian life situation from religious perspective. Historically, corruption is a global phenomenon its endemic nature has affected every strata of human society; hence no nation is immune to its crutching effects. This paper explores the multifaceted dimension of corruption in the Nigerian society. The method adopted for this research paper is historical and theological approach. Findings show that every political, social, economic, cultural and religious institution is grappling with this monster. Having seen the deteriorating condition, the author came up with proffered solution and recommendations as a panacea for fighting corruption.

**Key words: Corruption, kickbacks, bribery, Fraud, Extortion**

### **Introduction**

Amnesty international in its current ranking rated Nigeria as the fifth most corruption nation in the world, despite its spiritual activities. Indeed Nigeria is very religious this is seen with the number of Churches and Mosques in every state, city, towns and villages. One begins to wander if such statements are made. This shows that there is wide gap between theory and praxis. Corruption has been a friendlies enemy of the Nigerian society over the years. Friendly, in the sense that albeit everyone knows that it is wrong and immoral, those who court it are more than those who hate it. The pervasive influence of corruption permeates all facets of the Nigerian *SiztImLeben*. In fact, it has risen to unprecedented heights in the Nigerian

society, despite attempts to curtail it. Chinua Achebe in his critical analysis of the Nigerian society opines; “My Frank and honest opinion is that anybody who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not yet become an alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this country... corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming rate and entered the fatal stage” (47-47). Thus, this paper examines corruption in the Nigerian context in the light of biblical understanding, highlighting its social, political, cultural, moral, and economic pervasiveness in all strata of administration and corporations. It is sad to hear that corruption has a deep root in religious institutions instead of fighting it tooth and tail. The implication is that if this monster is not addressed as quick as possible it will have heavy consequences on the Nigerian society.

Therefore, there is every need to examine what corruption is and how it can be addressed accordingly?

## WHAT CORRUPTION MEANS

Though the discourse is about corruption but bribery is seen as another distinct category, but here, we shall be discussing in this paper that bribery is another form of corruption, not that corruption and bribery are distinct, but the later participates in the former, the greater assimilates the lesser. Therefore, bribery is one of the forms of corruption. Thus, 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 (Eze 168). Hence, it is easier to be descriptive than just defining it. In an attempt to define corruption, the encyclopedia Americana explains:

*A general term for the misuse of a public position of trust for private gain. Its specific definition and application vary with place, and culture ... Political corruption concerns the illegal pursuit or misuse of public office, Electoral corruption includes purchase of voters with money, promise of office or special favors... Corruption in office involves sales of legislative votes, administrative or judicial decision... disguised payment in form of gifts, legal fees, employment, favors to relatives ... or any relation that sacrifice the public interest and welfare, with or without the implied payment of money....(22)*

Corruption according to Bayley is “corruption is being tied 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” (719-732). While Werlin, describes corruption as the diversion of public resources to non-public purposes (71-85). In addition, corruption may be described as an abuse of privilege in varying forms geared toward conscripting public resources for private or personal gain, corruption is a universal phenomenon. Again corruption refers to what is faulty, immoral, perverted or depraved; it also refers to something that is decaying, putrid, impure, contaminated, unclean, or filthy. Something that is corrupt may contain errors or alterations, or be debased. To be corrupt means to be morally depraved, or to alter the initial or original state or form of standard of things (524). Corruption is the greatest evil that could befall any society or nation because it undermines any attempt to attain sufficiency and integrity in the polity. Worthy of note is the fact that, corruption is a voluntary act by its perpetrators, it is a conscious and deliberate act and its agendas are dubious. In a religious sense (Christianity) corruption is a product of the depravity of the human nature at the fall.

Corruption in Nigeria has several coded names: The police call it “*Kolanut*,” journalist call it “*the brownenvelop*,” the politicians call it “*welfare package*,” Pastors call it “*Apostolic blessing*,” politicians in the North call it “*Chin hanchi or kayanaiki*” literally “materials for work”; Hausa housewives call it “*pinche*” “Cut;” Igbos call it “*akaazu*” “giving through the back;” Yoruba calls it “*egunje*” “eating the

accursed thing,” Gagyì calls it “*gbebi*” “to close one’s mouth,” and some call it “*a deal*” “*settlement*,” “*Chuwachuwa*”, and “*chop you chop*”. All these are inducements which are used to influence actions, buy favour, or service. The western people call it “*lobby*”. Therefore, corruption has negative effects on communities, societies and nations. Today, the effects of corruption in Nigeria and Africa cut across the various strata of the society: economic, social, moral, political and even religious which has sets the African society in chaotic situation.

## TYPES OF CORRUPTION

Here, we want to examine several specific types of corruption that are commonly practiced in Nigeria, and indeed in many African countries, these are found everywhere, and it seeks to pervert integrity; these are defined as follows:

**Bribery:-** This is very common, is giving a gift or money to someone who is in a position of trust, in order to pervert judgment or grant a favor, it also means accepting such gifts, that is the briber and the bribed (Kunhiyop 16). And the motive behind bribe is corruption. Both Exodus 23:8 and Deuteronomy 16:19b teach clearly “Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous”.

In Nigeria bribery takes many forms; these are few examples:

Giving a petrol attendant a token to place you at the front of the queue.

Giving the policeman/woman something so that he/she will not delay your travel any further.

Giving a clerk something so that he/she will process your paper quickly. Paying the judge so that he/she will rule in your favor.

Bribery is always wrong. Both the person who takes the bribe and the one, who gives it, are equally guilty (Helleman 14).

**Extortion:** Is when a person in authority demands money, through threats, violence or misuse of authority, whoever gives these gifts is forced to do so (Grenz and Smith 38). In Biblical times extortion was also common, and the psalmist in his days strongly condemns extortion: “*Do not trust in extortion or take pride in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them* (Psalm 62:10); “*Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.* (Ecclesiastes 7:7). “*Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself by extortion! How long must this go on?* (Habakkuk 2:6). In the New Testament, John the Baptist talks some soldiers: “*Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely-be content with your pay*” (Luke 3:14).

Extortion is worse than bribery, because it uses force. Both practices are wrong, however, and will ultimately destroy a nation if allowed to continue indefinitely.

**Nepotism:** Is giving undue preference to one’s relatives and family in the

giving of contracts or positions, favors or property. It is another form of favoritism. Nepotism is wrong because the people we prefer are our family members and friends who may not be qualified (Ryrie 433). Nepotism occurs for example when:

A government official awards a contract to family members when a better qualified contractor is available.

A school principal hires members of his own family to teach in his school, though they are not qualified as the other applicants.

The founder of a church appoints his wife and children as board of trustees. Many independent churches are run like little empires, in which there is little or no accountability.

**Tribalism:** Is closely related to nepotism. Tribalism is giving undue preference to members of one's own tribe or ethnic group in the distribution of jobs, resources, whether in business, the church or the state. Tribalism is extending favors beyond one's family, as in nepotism, to one's ethnic group. This too is another form of corruption. Churches today should be at the forefront of fighting tribalism, instead they are often divided along tribal or ethnic lines.

**Fraud:** It includes financial crimes, such as forging of cheques and inflating costs, interfering with receipts; it also occurs when funds raised for church buildings or activities such as famine relief, for poor children school fees, and funds for disabled in society are not put to the intended use

or misappropriated (Otenyo 59). Again there is educational fraud and this is not only common in Africa, Nigeria but all over the world. It is evident in admission to educational institutions, during examinations, in class rooms, in the writing of academic papers and thesis, and among those who seek employment or promotion.

**Admission Fraud:** Occurs in many ways such as official documents are falsified by students or parents, often with the help of school authorities or a student's name is added to an admission list through influence.

**Examination fraud:** that is before the examination, when the questions are "leaked" to some students during examination or when students will use handset or cell phones, text books, notebooks, cheat sheets, and answer sheets, that students smuggle into the exam hall. And after the examination, by bribing examiners or giving gratification, so that they will be marked leniently or by changing the results with the help of the officials and some female students sleep with their lecturers to get better grades, although sometimes lecturers often initiate this (Helleman 20-21). Education fraud sometimes involves extortion, as when lecturers sell handouts for excessive amounts.

**Plagiarism:** This is a common type of fraud that occurs when writing academic papers and thesis, when students or lecturers copy words or ideas that belong to another person and claim them as their own.

**Poor work practices:** Poor work practices are not just common to the continent of Africa, they are found in every society, these are evident in the following ways:

- Arriving late and leaving early at work.
- Being satisfied with sloppy work. It seems that craftsmanship has disappeared these days.
- Using government and public utilities for personal affairs.
- Not engaging in what you are employed to do. Example like teaching in primary, post primary and even some lecturers, some workers too they don't go to work but engage in personal business (Grent 165 and Helleman 51).

The Bible teaches importance of work: *“One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys”* (Proverbs 18:9).

**Dishonest in Business:** Many people believe business and honesty cannot be combined. In our opinion, they can be combined. The following ways are dishonest practices in business.

- False measuring devices are common place in markets.
- False weighing devices or false containers to measure volume are used to cheat customers and to increase profits. Petrol stations modify their meters or sell sub-standard fuel for the same reason.
- Fake name-brand goods or pirated music and videos are on sale in almost every city and town.

- And many businesses manipulate their accounts in order to reduce taxes or to cover fraud.

*“The Lord detests differing weights and dishonest scales do not please him” (Proverbs 20:23). “You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God giving you. For the Lord your God detests anyone who does these things, anyone who deals dishonestly” (Deuteronomy 25:15) ( cf Lev. 19:36; Psalm 15:1-2).*

**Misuse of government and public property:** Whenever we use government/public property without permission; often people assume that whatever belongs to the state is public property and this can be used by any one. They do not realize that state property is a trust and they are only its stewards (Momoh 90-91). A steward does not own the property but only manages it. Similarly, government employees must not misuse property, since they only manage it; it belongs to all the citizens, and not to just to those who claim it as their own.

## CAUSES OF CORRUPTION

Here we shall be looking at the factors responsible for corrupt practices in Nigeria and First, this question may be addressed from a theological point of view, namely: The sinful nature of man may be responsible. The Bible affirms that man is morally bankrupt or corrupt. Thus his heart is inclined toward evil

ways (Gen. 6:4; Jer. 17:9; Ps. 14:2-5; 52:3-4; Rom. 3:10-12).

Secondly, is quest for materialism, the society is getting crazy with the “get rich quick” syndrome. The quest for money which is considered the sure guarantee for wealth, possession, pleasure, power and prestige has taken deep root in our society. Closely related to the fore going observation is the issue of selfishness and greediness contributed to corruption in Nigeria.

Thirdly, the factors that are responsible for corruption in Nigeria and West Africa include: poverty and the very poor conditions of service in the public sector, moral bankruptcy, Job insecurity, and social insecurity after retirement, conflict between societal norms and bureaucratic norms, societal attitude to wealth, and non-deterrent laws and enforcement.

Fourthly, lack of proper understanding of patriotism among Nigerians and Africans and lack of teaching moral principles from parents to children in our society, therefore contribute to the decay of moral norms and values.

In view of the above mentioned causes of corruption, it can be observed that the issue of corruption is a moral matter. It takes more than mere policy statement to curb it and cure the society of this evil. A religious influence is needed to regenerate the heart and sanitize the conscience.

## EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Most of this part of the presentation is taken from Samuel WajeKunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Bukuru: 2008), pp 167-168.

Corruption has pandemonium consequences on the society if not curb; that we should not ignore: **Erosion of moral values:** In corrupt society corruption perverts the sense of right and wrong. What is wrong becomes right, and the right becomes wrong. Kunhyop critically examines a catalogue of indicators of corruption in the African society

**Lack of honesty and transparency:** Corruption will encourage public office holders to shun transparency and accountability.

**We become calculating, not open-hearted and generous:** We measure others by what they can give for service than with courtesy, generosity and thoughtfulness. When we begin to measure what they can do for us, we reduce their humanity while indicting our own.

**Increased social evils:** Corruption will encourage all anti-social vices toward destroying a better society: nepotism, selfishness, dishonesty, fraud and even institutional decay.

**Manipulation:** Corruption will make one rather than experiencing an honest, open-hearted pursuit of living, when bribes are the norms one must plan how to satisfy the ticket seller, customs official, examination officials, each of whom demands a bribe before we receive their service.

**We are secretly ashamed:** In no country do corrupt and bribe takers speak publicly of their actions or announces the bribe they pay. Shame lives in the place where we hide deepest secrets, but these secrets reduce people and limit their capacity to live cheerfully, openly and joyfully.

**Oppression of the weak:** The weak, less privilege and the powerless; because only the powerful and influential can access the courts and resources to their own advantage, so they are always subdued.

**Disregard for the rule of law:** Corruption will encourage individuals, institutions, in cutting corners and ignoring legal requirements and this becomes norms of the day.

**Loss of public trust and destruction of the moral fiber of society:** Corruption makes the society believe that the truth is relative and graded base on personal judgments of right and wrong, and that people will not have trust in the system of governance. People's consciences will lose respect for life, property, transparency and accountability.

**Poor productivity, administration and ineffective development:** Society that is corrupt will not take pride in the quality of service, and poor service becomes the order and norms of the day. Standards again will not be respected, even in educational system, health institutions and all ramifications and strata of the society.

**Limited foreign and domestic investment and general underdevelopment:** No foreign investor would want to invest in a corrupt nation; even local investors will not dare to do that. And even corruption will undermine the very democracy we celebrate.

**We become prisoners of corruption:** When one becomes a prisoner of what they formally fought, they will tell stories to justify their actions. As a prisoner, the bribe giver or taker will not only be taken by their own lies but

will have an insatiable desire for more, because corruption breeds corruption (167-168).

The effect of corruption has many other dimensions related to political, moral, economic, social, and even environmental effects. In political spheres, corruption impedes democracy and the rule of law. In a democratic system, public institutions and offices may lose their credibility when they misuse their power for private gain. Corruption may also result in negative consequences such as encouraging cynicism and reducing interest of political participation, political instability, reducing political competition, reducing transparency of political decision making, distorts political development and sustaining political activity on patronage, clientelism and money.<sup>2</sup>

In our society the impact of corruption is often manifested through political intolerance, the problems is lack of accountability and transparency to the public, low level of democratic culture, principle of consultation and participation, dialogue among others. And in social sphere, corruption discourages people to work together for common good. Corruption frustrates and generates apathy which results in a weak civil society. Demanding and paying bribes becomes the tradition. It also results in social inequality and widened gap between the rich and the poor.

The economic effects apart what we enumerated earlier which can be categorized under minor and major. However, both in one way or the other have serious impact on the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://answers.yahoo.com/question>

individuals, community and country. First and foremost, corruption leads to the depletion of national morals and wealth. It is often responsible for increase of costs of goods and services, the funneling of scarce public resources to un-economic high profile projects at the expense of the much needed projects such as schools, hospitals and roads, or the supply of potable water, and diversion and misallocation of resources is tantamount to development, conversion of public wealth to private and personal property, inflation, imbalanced economic development, weakling work ethics and professionalism, hindrance of development of fair in market structures and unhealthy competition there by deterring fairness. Large scale corruption hurts the economy and impoverishes entire population and country.

### **BIBLICAL STANCE ON CORRUPTION**

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word “*shochad*” is usually translated as *bribe*, but sometimes as gift or ransom (proverbs 6:25) or present (2 Kings 16:8). And “*Minhah*” normally is translated as gift, but sometimes as bribe. Both “*Shochad*” and “*Minhah*” are used to show the submission of an inferior to a superior in the Old Testament context. The concept or idea of bribe or gift in this sense does not appear in the New Testament.

The Bible offers examples of corruption in different ways and it also explain the origin of the corrupt nature of humans (Olajubu 414). In other words, the cause and effect of corruption in the universe may be located in the Bible. In addition, remedies and techniques to correct corrupt tendencies are offered in the Bible. The state of human mind is basic to human

actions and corruption is a product of corrupt mind. Furthermore, the concept of corruption as earlier propounded is closely related with ethical convictions of what is right and wrong in a given setting, hence the issue of morality comes to the fore. Biblical ethical prescriptions therefore, feature prominently in any assessment of corruption as it concerns the Christians.

The Bible first mentions corruption in Genesis 6:11-13, which records the state of the earth before the destruction of the earth with a flood. In this passage, corruption is equated with wickedness (Genesis 6:5). Other examples of corruption in the Bible validates the equation of corruption to wickedness. For example, Cain murdered Abel to cover up his inadequacy before God; Esau sold his birthright to Jacob because of hunger; Jacob snatched Esau’s blessings from Isaac their father through dubious means, Potiphar’s wife tried to entice Joseph into adultery and Achan took spoils of war that were supposed to be set apart for God, due to greed (Genesis 25, 27, 39; Joshua 6, and 7). The Bible condemns corruption in Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19; 27:25; Proverbs 13:11 and 20:17. Balaam a prophet, accepted money to render services to Balak and enemy of God’s people, and though God only allowed him to pronounce blessings on Israel, instead of the curses that Balak wanted (Numbers 22:1-24:25), his advice later led to the enticement of the Israelites to immorality, which brought a terrible plague from the Lord upon them (Numbers 31:16, Cf. 25:1-9).

The moral decadence of Hophni and Phinehas the sons of Eli, was manifest in their desecration of God’s sacrifices and immorality



with women (1Samuel 2:12-17, 22). It led to God's judgment upon the house of Eli and their loss of the priesthood (1Samuel 2:27-34). There was also the case of bribery to pervert justice recorded against Ahab and Jezebel his wife, when two men perjured against Naboth that he had blasphemed and Naboth was stoned to death, so that Ahab might take possession of his vineyard (1Kings 21:1-16). The two sons of Belial who bore false witness against Naboth were obviously rewarded (bribed) to do so.

In the New Testament, bribery is recorded when the chief priests and elders gave money to the soldiers who, had guarded Christ's tomb and witnessed aspects of his resurrection, for the soldiers to say that the disciples went to steal Christ's body. The soldiers succumbed to the monetary enticement (Matthew 28:11-15). Zachaeus, too was notably corrupt before his conversion (Luke 19:1-18). John the Baptist exhorted publicans and 'soldiers against obvious corrupt practices (Luke 3:12-14). Judas Iscariot took a bribe to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16). And then, there was the expectation of Felix, the governor of Caesarea, that Paul might bribe him in order to be set free from prison; an expectation which was disappointed (Acts 24:26-27). Those in the Bible who were not ruled by allegiance to God's moral standards always accepted bribes or gave bribes to get what they wanted. Only those who chose to obey God overcame the influence of corruption.

An observation of all the acts classified as corruption or wickedness in the Bible, shows that they negate continuously the principles of God. Moreover, such acts negate the summary of the law and prophets which is given by

Jesus in two commandments: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself*" (Matthew 22:37-39). Consequently the Bible condemns corruption in its entirety and encourages repentance and a commitment to God's injunctions. Again, the Bible recognizes the inability of humans to do the will of God in their fallen state and this explains the reasons for the unfolding of the salvation plan through the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible stance is that the regeneration of the human mind is imperative for corruption free human society.

We must bear in our mind that the Bible is for all cultures, for all times, and for all social classes. Scripture is clear that God's people, who are in position of power and leadership, must uphold blind, impartial justice. But all of God's people do not have godly rulers most often. Many times His people suffer under unjust decision makers, blaspheming tyrants, or lazy clerks. In such situations God's compassion and wisdom are found in His words.

## MECHANISM FOR FIGHTING CORRUPTION

### Attitudinal Change

Change is a popular word currently in use in President Buhari's administration. Nigeria is admonished to desist from all engagements that portray corrupt practice. Change is an individual response to negates corruption in any way and wherever. When this attitude is inculcated and disciplined then our actions will change in the way we do things devoid of corruption. The bible maintains that the heart

of man is desperately wicked, evil and corrupt, but the good news is that the heart can be transformed through regeneration of God's spirit and by constant reading of God's word and practice. This is first and foremost way of dealing with corruption.

### **Right Political Culture**

Gone are the days of political immaturity. At least Nigeria should have attained some level of maturity in its democratic process by the number of years in democracy, which I strongly believe is the present drive. Rigging and violence during election should be the things of the past and not even mentioned. The credible demonstration of President Goodluck Jonathan's action is worthy of note when the presidential results was declared says "my ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian". This is right political culture and paradigm for our politicians to embrace in order to achieve peace and mutual respect for the institution of democracy. We must eschew violence and corruption from every angle.

### **Whistle Blowing**

Looking at the endemic nature of corruption in Nigeria several methods have been put in place in to fight it to the barest minimal level. Whistle blowing as a mechanism for fighting corruption in recent times has aided this fight with great result. Hence, billions of hard currency and local notes have been recovered from individuals and handed over to the government. Despite the results achieved results so far, there have been reactions from the general public of this mechanism because of the benefit attached to the whistle blower. This viable method has instilled fear in many

Nigerians across board. In fact, Nigerians are more conscious that corruption is bad and unacceptable practice whether directly or indirectly. What is crucial in this exercise is the security of the whistle blower which must be protected. In fact the government should enforce a law to protect them.

### **Theological Responsibility**

The church should be involved in discipleship. Discipleship in the church is the major means of raising the most effective army to fight in the anti-corruption crusade. The church of Christ is in the best position to train men and women, leading them to conversion, and commitment to Jesus Christ. Discipline and perseverance should be embraced by the church as indispensable tools for overcoming corruption. Every theological educator and theological students should shun corruption from every angle and live exemplary life of "corruption free life". In order to fight corruption to the last point, church leaders should get the congregation to participate in the crusade against injustice in all ramifications.

The church should discipline individuals who are found wanting with corrupt practices so as to shun others from its practice. The church should also be able to control themselves against dubious ways of acquisition of wealth, property, greed and impatience.

In matters concerning civic responsibility both the church and government should collaborate to engage people in exposing looters to be brought to book, no matter what their social status is, be it senators, members of the houses of assembly both state and federal, governors

and the president, and any other public office holder. The rule of law should be properly enforced to support the above position.

Integrity, courage and dignity of labour should be the norm for everybody both young and old. Thus, parents should inculcate these moral virtues in their children when they are still young and when they are old they will not depart from it (Proverbs 29:17).

Corruption should be part of our social studies curriculum in all our primary schools, post primary schools and tertiary institutions. Also copies of all anti-corruption bills should be given out to schools, colleges, universities, and to individuals for free to encourage the crusade against corruption.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have established that corruption in Nigeria is not an illusion but is a leaving reality. It has permeated all aspects of the Nigerian society. Corruption is said to have been the factors for the falling down of regimes and society and great men/women. Corruption has by way undermined the legitimacy of business and governments and weakened their structures, reducing productivity, hindering developments, worsening poverty, marginalizing the poor, creating social unrest and then to their down fall. Almost no institution is free from the phenomenon. We have also set some mechanisms on ground, to fight this monster; in a total and unequivocal commitment to its elimination by those in authority and the common people. It must be pointed out that attempts to eradicate corruption from the society must begin with

character transformation. Character is said to be one of the greatest motivating powers in the world. The “change advocacy” syndrome is the surest way to start. Together we shall build a country where peace, innovation, sharing of natural resources and development would be the highest goal that binds us together as one united country with diversities of culture in which the legacy of morals will be passed to our children.

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