Volume 21 Issue 36
Originally issued as C4



Global Journal of human-social science: C
Sociology & Culture
Volume 21 Issue 4 Version 1.0 Year 2021
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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Keywords: *religion, corruption, christianity, islam.*

GJHSS-C Classification: *FOR Code: 220499*



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Religion and the Extent of Corruption in Nigeria

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I. Introduction

Religion affects life in so many ways in society. It provides its members with moral values and symbols through which members are integrated (Anyacho 2013). Most of religion inculcates moral values into the lives of its adherents, prescribe specific life-style that contains the right and wrong in the society. These are done especially during a religious gathering in churches, mosques, and shrines

In Nigeria, there are varieties of religions, but only three are recognized. They are African Traditional Religion (ATR) and the two imported religions; Christianity and Islam. A majority of Nigeria belongs to Christianity and Islam. These religions have their norms, values and acceptable moral standards that are against corruption of any kinds in society. Christianity and Islam are growing faster in Nigeria and Nigerians are the most religious people in the world. Paradoxically, that same country which is reputed as the most religious country is also very present on the list of the most corrupt in the world (Ilori 2010).

Every Sunday and Friday, churches and mosques in Nigeria are usually filled with many people from all walks of life. Yet on other days, many Nigerian will perpetrate fraud, bribery, kidnapping, bombing, and several crimes against humanity and divinity. These have paralyzed every sector of the nation's economy, politics and socio-religious activities.

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People that perpetuate these acts of corruption in Nigeria are always celebrated, honored, recognized. They are in most cases awarded with chieftaincy titles, honorary doctorate degrees by different institutions of higher learning and their relatives respectively. The most worrisome, those government officials accused and convicted for corruption ranging from bribery, misappropriation of public fund to embezzlement are all religious adherents. This included former inspector general of police, former governors, former ministers, bank officials, civil servants, and businessmen (Tom 2013). It is against this background that the paper examines religion and the extent of corruption in Nigerian today.

II. Theoretical Framework

The work relies on Rigg's theory of prismatic society. Formalism is one of the characteristics of prismatic society. It is the amount of discrepancy between the norms and practices. The wide spread of formalism is a distinguishing mark of the prismatic system. That is the laws on the statute book are one thing, the actual behavior of the people or official is another. Not that the law is irrelevant to behavior. Indeed, the people or official may insist on partial performance of the law or he may disregard it totally. An official may choose to enforce the law or permit its total violation depends, presumably, upon his inclinations and his advantage. It is easy to notice that administrative direction based on formalism opens the door to corruption. The client may have to pay the official to carry out the law-as in the issuance of permits, licenses, quota allocations or to overlook violations as in the payment of taxes. In a society like Nigeria with a high level of formalism it is very commons to note a discrepancy between what the laws say and what is practiced. Such attitude is seen in all aspects of lives among Nigerians whose majority are very religious which is evident among adherents of Christianity and Islam. There is discrepancy between what they preach and what they do. This explains why religion is unable to reduce corruption in Nigeria.

III. Clarification of Concepts

Religion is a worldwide phenomenon; it is being practiced everywhere on the surface of the earth. Religion practices vary based on revelation, exposition, conviction and environment. These are reasons why there is no universally accepted definition of religion. Western scholars like Marx view religion as "Opium" of

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the masses, based on practice and environment where he found himself. In contrast, Durkheim views religion as a social organization based on his exposition and conviction. Ilori (1993) view religion base on conviction and revelation as "a man relation to divine or superhuman powers and the various organized system of beliefs and worship in which these relationships have been expressed. The belief in the existence of such is general conviction common to all people and all stages of culture." Therefore, concluded his definition of religion as man's highest effort to know the nature of the ultimate to organize his activities in light of this knowledge and entered emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually into a relationship with the ultimate. In this paper, the concept religion applies principally to such system as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) which involve obedience to a moral code set down in sacred scriptures and traditional norms and values of society, and participation in commons practices. Religion therefore, is a set of ideas and beliefs about the "supernatural" and its impact on the lives of human beings. These contain certain guidelines of behaviors and codes of conduct that individuals are expect to follow to maintain a good relation with the divine being and their fellow human beings.

Corruption has no single definition despite its daily usage. Charmer (1997) argues that the specific definition of corruption varies with time, place, and culture. He however, defined corruption from a political point of view as "general terms for the misuse of a public position of trust for private gains." In Nigeria's context, ICPC Act (2000) defines corrupt acts to include" bribery, fraud and other related offenses." Anyacho (2013), defined corruption to includes such behaviors as diversion of public funds to private purses, not being obliged to discharge an obligation, employment of unqualified persons in jobs they are not qualified to do because of the advantage the employers would get from such employee. Looting public treasury to enrich oneself, and changing election results to favor unpopular contestants, etc.

In this paper, the writers provide a simple working definition in a religious perspective that would not lend itself to any form of ambiguity. It views Corruption as social and spiritual immorality that manifest itself in various forms in human actions, such as dishonesty, fraud, bribery, selfishness, embezzlement, covetousness, greediness, rigging of the election, sexual harassment, examination malpractices, perversion of justice, over-invoicing, inflation of contracts, nepotism, bigotry, looting of the public treasury and the likes. It can be theft of public trust whether the person concerned is elected, selected, nominated or is appointed. It does not matter whether the person affected holds office or not since anybody can involve. Corruption in whatever form, meaning or circumstance it will assume, will always remain a condemnable act, a crime against humanity and God in general.

IV. Roots of Corruption in Nigeria

There are several roots of corruption in Nigeria. Amujiri (2002) pointed out Poor wages and high cost of living. He noted that, Workers from both private and public sectors in Nigeria has many needs, need to build a house, take care of family, trains children, transport to office, look after their health and thought of the future. Hence, in discharging their functions, workers hardly receive assistance from the government or employer despite poor wages and high cost of living. This poor wages and salaries received and the high cost of living induces both public and private officers to get corrupt to meet the high cost of living and to maintain an adequate living lifestyle.

It is no longer news to hear that policemen, soldiers, directors, teachers, traditional rulers and even some religious leaders can openly and unashamedly demand for and accept gratifications of different kinds before doing whatever they are supposed or in some cases, genuinely employed to do for the development and progress of society.

Greediness is a root of corruption in Nigerian society. It is a desire for materialism. Corruption triumphs in Nigeria because no person seems to be satisfied with what they have. Greediness or the desires to get rich quick or material wealth highly dominate the life of the Nigerians. According to Okolo (1994), "Nigerian defines Value, social success and importance practically in terms of money and material value alone." In Nigeria society today, people are value base on the size of his bank book, his number of housing estates, the number of transport cars, and how much he spends on funerals, weddings, and social parties.

Bad leadership contributed to increase in corruption in Nigeria. Leadership in Nigeria as according to Obasi (2000) has largely been "hypocritical." Right from 1960, when Nigeria gained independent, the political elites, be it civilian or military pursue selfish interests at the expense of the masses. For some decades, Nigeria has not been opportune to enjoy the dividend of good and exemplary leadership, who have the interests of the people at heart and also ready to sacrifice personal gains for the greatest number of the citizens. Achebe quoted in Nwokereke (2002), explains that:

> The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely, a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land and climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, or to the challenge of personal example, which are hallmarks of true leadership.

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In Nigeria, most of our leaders especially, military and political office holders are corrupt. They have been subject to abused of power. They loot public treasury with impunity. The masses also imitate their leaders. This explains why the messenger who receives unjust wages will declare your file missing until you bribe them. It also explains why police officers and soldiers extort money from public without any sense of guilt. It further explains why many Nigerian are involved in kidnapping, fraud and other criminal related offenses.

The pressure from extended family increase corruption in Nigeria. In many parts of Nigeria, there exist the practices of taking care of extended family. Most families find it very difficult to meet their financial obligation in the face of growing poverty and disillusionment. This financial obligation imposed by extended family system as the result of poverty makes Nigerians strive at all cost to get-rich-quick, no matter the available means used in attaining such goals. The result is corruption, diversion of public funds for private use, fraud, kidnapping, dishonesty, and the likes. Concurring on this fact, Akin-George (1985) asserted that, the demand for a large family and pressure from extended family drive the weak-hearted to commit corruption. He opined that since our culture imposes on us the responsibility for extended family and our immediate families, some people tend to find unorthodox means of discharging such responsibility.

The societal influence and attitude of recognizing and honoring those who were rich through hook and crook ways increase corruption in Nigerian society. According to Amujiri (2002), Nigerian society respects and adores wealthy men and women. And if one finds himself in the employment of the government, especially on the high cadre, the society expects such a person to enrich himself and if he does not, the society sees him as a failure. Most often, people now invite such a person to different occasions as chief launcher and chairman. To live up to expectations of society, such employees cannot but steal from the public treasury or involved in other immoral acts. In other way, the community in which the public officers may have come from would expect him to employ their community members to different offices even when the persons are not qualified and such influence also occur when contracts are too awarded. The results of such expectations are tribalism, nepotism, and bigotry.

In Nigeria, those who are rich through fraud, stealing and other corrupt practices were giving position, recognize, honor, and hailed when they donate a huge amount of money to religious functions , social gatherings, and public places. While those that have not are dishonor, neglected, and abandoned to their fate. Confirming this fact, Ikekwun (1994) identified the urge for material wealth with the high crime rate in Nigeria. He further noted that:

> Nigeria is a capitalist country where one is assessed by the type of car one drives, the number of houses one owns and even the number of wives one has. This societal setup has created a mad urge in the individual to acquire material wealth by hook or by crook. Some do not care any more about their families and the upbringing of their children. All they want is wealth at all cost.

Moral decadence increase corruption in Nigeria. Social norms and values which hold society together are enshrined in religion and are sacred from each. Every religion provides its members with moral codes or values that regulate human conduct in society. In Nigeria today, the moral codes or values are collapsed and neglected. People tend to say nothing and do nothing about the moral virtues of the religion and society. In his observation, Umoh (1981) opined that;

> Ethics and morality are for the dogs. Those who amass wealth by thievery, cheating, trickery, robbery, burglary, bribery, embezzlement and all sorts of traditionally unapproved or corrupt means are accorded the greatest respect in the society. They are among the first to be chosen as leaders and representatives of the people. They are among the chairmen and occupants of the high tables at our social and religious functions.

There is a common belief among people that, poverty and unemployment are some of the major factor that increases corruption in Nigeria. There exists a great deal of poverty and unemployment among Nigerians in almost every segment of their societal life. In Nigeria today, it is just a few families that can be the boast of three square meals a day, wear good clothes or enjoy the basic necessities of life such as water, a good road network, and electricity. Hence according to Kingsley (2002), everyone takes corruption no matter one's own small capacity as a way of making up or balancing the prevalent inequalities. This is the reason why there is a high level of kidnapping, armed robbery, theft, and other related crimes in Nigeria today.

V. The Extent of Corruption in Nigeria

Most of the religious leaders in Nigeria preach morality, social justice, peace and equality among their adherents in Mosques, Churches, and Shrines. Their doctrines do not condone corruption of any kinds. Despite the high level of religiosity corruption is at increase geometrically among individuals, public and private institutions, religious organizations, and the commoners. Most of the people accused of corruption charges in Nigeria are religious adherents or leaders. Even the policemen and soldiers who take some bribes from motorists and passengers on high ways do not hide their misdeeds, even though their religious doctrines frown at it. (*The Guardian 7th April, 2020).*

Most of the Legislators in Nigeria are religious adherents. But they are corrupt. They are involved in budget padding and required presidential handshake before passing an appropriation bill into law (*Vanguard*

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27th July, 2016). There are cases of lecturers who harassed students in the name of sex or money for marks or students who are eager to give money to their lecturers to pass their examination, these results to malpractice in academy activities (*Premium Times Nigeria 15th January 2020).* All these people are religious adherents.

Executive arms of government in Nigeria are corrupt. They give a contract to individuals and companies at inflated rates and get funds for parties in return. Most state governors in Nigeria are corrupt. They inflate contracts, embezzled funds for the development of states and local governments. They deviates money means for the payment of local governments and primary school workers' salaries, pension and gratuity for their personal use. Some government officials collect money from their clients before attending to them (*Premium Times 13th June 2018, The Nation 8th December 2019).* Most of these executive are religious adherents.

Electorates and aspirants in Nigeria are religious adherents but are corrupt. They are involved in vote selling and vote-buying. The electoral body in Nigeria and its officials are corrupt. Electoral officials collect money from aspirant of political party to change election results (Human Right Watch 2007). Scarcely does anybody believe that there can be election won in Nigeria without serious rigging. Thugs who were bribed by political parties shot and maimed people and make away with ballot boxes and papers are religious adherents (*The Guardian 17th November 2019*). Census officials also alter census figures in exchange for money. There are cases of Bank officials who tapped money illegally from their customer account in the name of bank charges. Telecommunication companies in Nigeria are corrupt. They deduct money from customer account even during the bad network.

Judiciaries in Nigeria are corrupt. There are many cases of judges who collected and perverted justice or members of anti-corruption institutions who were involved in corruption which they supposed to fight against (*Punch 12th January 2019, The Guardian 8th July, 2020*). Medical health workers in Nigeria are also corrupt. They are found of diverting drugs and patients to their private practices. There are also cases of structural and facility-level, and accountability issues in Nigeria health sectors.

Some religious leaders in Nigeria are corrupt. They sometimes covered corrupt people in their congregation. For this reason, Adenugba and Omolawal (2014) opined that:

> Religion is unfortunately, providing a negative support for government as most government officials use it to abuse the collective conscience of the people through their deceits and manipulation. From all indications, it could be seen that long before the global economic meltdown currently being experienced, Nigeria has been experiencing religious meltdown and not only has it failed to curb corruption, but it has in itself become a channel of corruption.

Many highly placed Nigerians today embezzle or misappropriate millions of naira while at the same time struggling to occupy front seats in the church or mosque or even take religious titles. Many of these leaders during the oath-taking ceremonies swear to the Holy Bible and Holy Quran to provide faithful and honest governance, security of lives and property and to protect the integrity of the nation. Surprisingly, such declaration ends during the ceremony; the next action is a crime against humanity and divinity.

Apart from their attitude of covering corrupt public and private officials in their congregation, those involved in the assassination, cheating arms robbery, thievery and banditry, kidnapping and bombing in Nigeria are religious leaders and adherents. Religion especially the imported; Christianity and Islam are not making a significant difference to Nigeria today as a nation. Although there is a proliferation of churches, Mosques and prosperity preaching but the nation has known nothing but corruption, since independent in 1960. The degree of corruption in the country has gone to the extent that many no longer see it as evil. It is no longer done in secret. The main reason is that many religious adherents in Nigeria have failed to apply the beliefs and doctrines of religion to their whole life, limiting it to religious pretense only. They read the scriptures, the Bible and the Quran selectively, neglecting those that deal with justice, peace and well-being of the citizens.

VI. Religion and Corruption in Nigeria

Religion in Nigeria; especially, Christianity and Islam condemn corruption. As earlier mentioned, most of Nigerians belong to one of these two imported religions. Christianity does not accept corruption of any kinds. Christians rely on the Bible as their guide and constitution. Bible admonishes Christians to abhor crime against divinity and the fellow human beings. All forms of corruption are forbidden in the Bible as could be seen in the following scriptures; Deuteronomy 10:17, Proverbs 17: 23 and Exodus 23: 8 warn Christians against being partial and taking bribe. Similarly, 1Corinthians 5:9-11 urges Christians to quit mixing in company with fornicator, greedy person, extortioner, an idolater, reviler or drunkard all of which are corrupt practices. In Isaiah 33:15 God describes the one who will find his favor to be "the one who walks in continual righteousness, who speaks what is upright, who rejects dishonest, fraudulent gain, whose hands refuse a bribe rather than grabbing it, who closes his ear to talk of bloodshed, and who shuts his eyes to avoid seeing what is bad." At Ephesians 4:28 the Bible admonishes the thief to steal no more. Again in Roman 13:1-7 and 1Peter 2: 13-15 Christians are commanded to be in

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subjection to superior authority and to pay tax, fear and honor them. All these commandments are summed up by Jesus Christ as two greatest commandments, the love of God and the love of neighbor (Divinity and humanity). Love of God and love of neighbor would not allow any Christian to involve in any form of corruption (Matthew 22:37). In other words, if you love God and human beings you will not cheat, bombs, kidnap, assassinate, and steal from them.

Similarly, the Islamic position on corruption is quite clear. A Muslim goes through pages of the Holy Qur'ān and Hadith for all roles to play both physical and spiritual. The Qur'an and Hadith had strongly condemned corruption in all spheres of life and call for justice to reign supreme in all circumstances. It is clearly stated in the Qur'ān that everybody is required to do justice and act righteously in all conditions and towards whomsoever including relatives regardless of gender, religious, socio-cultural background and even against one's own self or interest: Allah said: "O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it is (against) rich or poor for God can best protect both". (Qur'an 4:135).

Islam looks at corruption from moral and ethical angle and strongly offers a universally comprehensible blueprint for human behavior which revolves social justice, equitable distribution of wealth, provision of necessities and the protection of the weak against economic exploitation by the strong. This explain why the prophet said "whoever from you is appointed by us to a position of authority and he conceals from us a needle or something smaller than that, it will be misappropriation of public funds and he will have to produce it on the day of judgement".

The Glorious Qur'an says: "Those who cancel Allah's revelation in the Book and purchase for them a miserable profit, they swallow into themselves naught but fire; Allah will not address them on the Day of Resurrection nor purify them; grievous will be their penalty". (Qur'an 2: 174) Another verse says:-

> "As for those who sell the faith they owe to Allah and their own plighted word for a small price; they shall have no portion in the Hereafter; nor will Allah Speak to them or Look at them on the Day of Judgement nor will HE cleans them (of sin): they shall have a grievous penalty" (Qur'an 3:77).

Muslims scholars in Nigeria always preached against injustice in various places of worships, schools, and lectures avenues to all responsible to do Justice to their clients before the day of accountability. Also Justice be upheld even with those who show hate, enemies and those who are alien.

Other provisions in the Islamic religion that forbid Muslims from engaging in corruption as cited by Shehu (2012) included those found in the Holy Qur'an in Chapter 11 Verse 85 which says "o my people give full measure and full weight with equity and defraud not people of their things and commit not inequity in the earth causing disorder". Also Prophet Mohammed enjoins Muslims to desist from illegal enrichment of them as shown in the Hadith: "the flesh that grows out of unlawful income has no place in the hereafter but hell". Similarly, Prophet Mohammed remarked that: "What rights have you to put aside something that does not belong to you. If you were to remain in your father's house would you get what you are taking?" From the preceding, it could be concluded that Islam has zero tolerance for corruption.

Despite with the above role of religion in fighting corruption in Nigeria, corruption is still spreading on daily basis. It was so because religious leaders and adherents in Nigeria continue to live a life hypocrite. They read the scriptures; the Bible and the Quran selectively. Those areas that deal with justice, morality, and well-being of the citizens were neglected.

VII. Recommendations

The fight against corruption in Nigeria is a moral one that cannot be won by government alone or by the sword of legal penalties. It needs people that are morally and spiritually oriented which Christianity and Islam are part of it and has a central role to play. Therefore, this paper strongly recommended that;

i. Religion as practiced in Nigeria must provide its adherents with moral values and enlightens them on what is just and unjust, right and wrong, good and evil, virtue or vice. This will helps to cultivate the whole person and produces in man the virtues necessary for building a just and moral society. The majority of Nigeria belongs to one religious persuasion or the other. This offers Christianity and Islam an opportunity to address her members on the danger of acquiring wealth through corrupt practices. By so doing, the religious institutions play a complementary role to the government in fighting corruptions.

ii. Government at all levels and private sectors should pay their employees' wages and allowances promptly, provides infrastructures facilities and jobs opportunity for the teeming youths. These will help in development, and reduce corruption in Nigerian society.

iii. Moral Educations is very important in fighting corruption. Educations without morality destroy society. Therefore, Moral re-orientation had to be taken seriously in our schools, colleges and universities. Religious teachers and moral educators, who have fundamental roles to play in the moral regeneration of the citizens should be strengthened and improved by the government and religious institution.

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iv. Christianity and Islam which emphasizes regeneration, holiness, and righteousness for its members and as the only means of entering the kingdom of God, have a serious war to fight against corruption. The church and the mosque have to openly condemn corruption of any kinds. They are to speak out against the members who have enriched themselves through corrupt practices. The church and the mosque should not compromise their stand against the bad political leaders and should not close their eyes to the evils of the leaders. They must stand without religious bigotry and ethnic bias in disciplining those involved in corrupt practices.

VIII. Conclusion

This study revealed the depth of corruption in Nigeria, particularly in public, private institutions and religious organizations. The paper identified the various roots of corruption. It further revealed that the three major religions in Nigeria; especially Christianity and Islam condemn corruption. Their beliefs and doctrines are against all corrupt practices. Therefore, religion can be a vital tool for fighting corruption in Nigeria, if Christian and Islamic leaders and adherents in Nigeria live in conformity with their religious tenets. This will help and transform them like Biblical Matthew, Zacchaeus and Paul. That will make them refund the looted public and private funds and resist corruption of any kinds.

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