

CHRISTIANITY AND THE BANE OF CORRUPTION IN EDUCATION SECTOR IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Religion is considered as a system ordained by God for the guidance of humanity and this is not expected to be overlooked in its expectation in governance. It is the belief of the people that Christianity as a religion should play a vital role in the fight against corruption as it is expected to preach against and act against it most especially as it concerns education sector in Nigeria. Christianity preaches purity, holiness and honesty in its beliefs and practices and as a result, all its adherents are expected to imbibe the tenets of the beliefs and practices. Corruption in Nigeria has become a menace that stares one in the face as it serves as an impediment to physical growth and meaningful development. This issue of corruption appears in all facets of political and religious sectors and has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigeria's economy. From the rating of Transparency International through Corruption Perception Index (2002), Nigeria was rated the second most corrupt nation in the world. Corruption has been identified as the bane of most political and economic problems in Nigerian society. It is seen as an enemy of economic development because of its various vices. This paper examines corruption as a fabric that has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigeria's education sector and the role that Christianity as a religion could play in stemming down the menace. Christianity right from inception in Nigeria played a pivotal role in education through the missionary schools established by them which were of high quality/standard. Corruption is seen as a great impediment to the said manpower and national development in Nigeria. It also identified various areas of loopholes through which the operators of the education system manipulate it to siphon funds either to enrich themselves or to divert it for other purposes. This paper believes that Christianity should be in a better position to fight this menace in the education sector in Nigeria and reposition it to its place of pride. The paper recommends some measures that could curb this menace if not totally eradicated in order to make the dreams of building national development a reality.

Keyword: Religion, Fight against, Corruption, Opium, Menace

Introduction

Religion in any nation is looked unto as the watchdog of the politics and the players of it. Karl Marx in his definition of religion called it opium of the people. There is always a voice in every religion that speaks on contemporary issues in any country. Since the three principal religions in Nigeria – African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity preach in their various dogmas purity, holiness, righteousness and honesty coupled with dedication and commitment, their adherents are expected to cultivate and put into practice these teachings in order to reflect in all their deeds, words and actions. The problems facing Nigeria as a nation are multifaceted in terms of moral, ethical and attitudinal failure as well as disorientation whereas religion as an institution is expected to provide the moral and ethical standards for the believers. Whether the adherents put the dogmas into practice is another issue to look at. However, it is discovered that Nigeria in the early days of its independence, corruption was at the zero level because the political leaders then had zero tolerance for corruption because they were God-fearing. That was what made Nigeria to be the giant of Africa then, but reverse is the case today as corruption is running in the veins of majority of Nigerians – civil and religious. The religious organizations that should be the watchdog are also enmeshed in the menace.

Corruption in Nigeria has been described as systemic.

¹ And the unwholesome consequences are legion. Corruption has bred inefficiency and diminished productivity in both the public and private sectors of the economy. It has discouraged investment, fuelled capital flight, increased unemployment and inflation, created an acute degree of poverty, brought about a severe decline in the quality of life and life expectancy in Nigeria, and given Nigeria and Nigerians a terribly bad image in the eyes of the international community. Corruption is an affront on human dignity and an assault on human conscience, apart from being a negation of the religious vocation to promote holiness and righteousness in the world. This paper sets out to look at Christianity religion and the roles it has played in the past and what it can play to stem down or eradicate corruption in the education sector completely from the vein of every Nigerian.²

What is Religion?

Religion can be seen as part of fundamental life especially for Nigerians because every Nigerian seems to be religious in nature as they are involved in one religious activity or the other. However, one can say religion has a lot of influences on behavior and decision that people make in life because religious beliefs are taken very seriously and they affect almost all areas of life of Nigerians which reflect in their dressing, social greetings, feeding habit, living pattern and political affiliations among others.³ So, this affects their social behavior and misbehavior.

God features at the very beginning of Nigeria's constitution. In the preamble to the 1999 Nigerian constitution, it is affirmed that "*we intend to live together as one united country under God*". Indeed the overwhelming majority of Nigerians are religious people. Religious people believe in the supremacy of God as they believe that God is the very basis of individual lives and corporate existence. They believe in and relate with supernatural realities through prayers and supplications and through the offering of sacrifices.⁴ Churches, Mosques, Shrines and sundry prayer houses are found everywhere in Nigeria.⁵ Christians take part in crusades, worship sessions and vigils; they also offer sacrifices and observe fasting days and religious holidays; and both Christians and Muslims go in large numbers on religious pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Mecca, taking pride in being called Jerusalem Pilgrim (JP) or Alhaji the rest of their lives.

Religion helps in building moral standard in people through their beliefs in the Supreme Being Whom they believe is more powerful than humans; the religious faith and practices condemn immorality such as stealing, killing, arson, maiming, cheating and the likes in their religious teachings. Religion also plays fundamental roles in nation building and the fight against corruption as religious leaders are involved in impacting godliness into their followers. This is not to say that religion itself is completely free of corruption as some are of the view that religion also causes more damage and complicated the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The impact of religion and its place in the socio-political life of Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. Religion contributes to some of the factors causing corruption in the country.

Religion and Corruption in Nigeria

Christianity and Islamic religions control millions of followers; they hold strong influence in the determination of electoral, political, economic and policy formulations in Nigeria.⁶ Christian religious leaders who would have rebuked corrupt politicians and career officers are themselves guilty of corruption. This could not make them to preach the hard message of righteousness, holiness, and honesty because many of them are also after contract and gratis from government houses. Many sterling revelations were made open after the 2015 general elections in Nigeria as there were many allegations and counter-allegations levied against both Christian and Islamic religious leaders ranging from corruption cases to aiding and abetting to receiving election bribery for campaign for a particular candidate and to win the hearts of their followers.⁷

Some of the confessions as declared open were:

- Bafawara confessed he received #4.6bn from Col. Dasuki for spiritual purposes
- Ayo Oritsejafor, erstwhile CAN President was also alleged to have received \$35 million
- Pastor Dikwa, Executive Director of the Voice of Northern Christians also alleged that Christian Association of Nigeria received the sum of #7bn from former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to campaign for him as President for second term in office
- Thirteen Islamic clerics in Kaduna State were also alleged to have received their own share of the national cake from President Goodluck Jonathan for the same purpose.⁸

Nigerians are seen as highly religious but may not be spiritual because their religiosity is not translated to spirituality.⁹ Religious identity is far more important to Nigerians than their national identity. Before religion can effectively fight against corruption, there must be a clear cut demarcation between religious and political leaders. There must be a forced divorce between both parties. As long as religious

leaders are involved in corruption cases, this will weaken them from preaching against corruption in all forms.¹⁰

Nigerian Christianity

In the days of Portuguese contacts with Nigeria, Catholic priests had established missionary stations in Benin and the neighbourhood. Despite the work of Portuguese missionaries based on the Island of Sao Tome and later of Spanish missionaries in Benin, it was not until the nineteenth century that the Christian religion was firmly established in Nigeria. It started first among the Yoruba re-captives who had embraced the Christian faith while in Sierra Leone (freed from slave trading ships by the British Royal Naval Squadron), and who returned home between 1839 and 1845.¹¹ The pastors of the Church Missionary Society, from Badagry and later from Sierra Leone, visited these Christian communities in Abeokuta and other towns. Among the first missionaries was the Rev. Henry Townsend who went from Sierra Leone to Badagry in 1842 in his company was the Rev Ajayi Crowther.¹²

Success followed the efforts of the pioneer missionaries. C.M.S. churches were firmly established in several important towns, such as Abeokuta (1846), Lagos (1851), Ibadan (1853), and Oyo (1856). Next, branches of the C.M.S. church were founded in south-eastern Nigeria, the chief centres being Bonny and Brass. The effects of work done by Bishop Ajayi Crowther, assisted by the Igbo re-captive the Rev. J. C. Taylor, in these parts of southern Nigeria can still be seen today.

Other missionaries opened mission stations in the country. These included the Baptist missionaries who under the American evangelist, Thomas Bowen, started work from Ogbomosho in 1855. About the same time, the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) headed by the Rev. Hope Waddell started pioneering work, in 1846, in Calabar. Hope Waddell was later joined by the Rev. Hugh Goldie and William Anderson. Another missionary whose memory is revered in Nigeria was Mary Slessor, she arrived in the country in 1876, and for many years worked assiduously as a missionary nurse. She succeeded in stopping the killing of twins in the areas where she served.¹³

The story of the planting of Christianity in Nigeria would be incomplete without a mention of the Italian Roman Catholic priest, Father Berghero operating from Whydah in what is today the People's Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey), Father Berghero, in 1860, visited Abeokuta and Lagos where freed Catholic slaves from Brazil¹⁴ welcomed him warmly. A permanent station was established in Lagos in 1868, soon followed by others at Lokoja, Abeokuta and Ibadan. Within ten years of Father Berghero's visit, the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria had become so well established that it ceased to be under administration from Dahomey.¹⁵ By 1885, the church had spread further inland, due to the efforts of Father Joseph Lutz who started work around Onitsha in 1886 and spread the gospel in many parts of the present day Imo and Anambra States. Another important Catholic missionary in this area was the Irishman, Bishop Shanahan. Although Lokoja had a small C.M.S. station in 1858, it was not until 1889 that the missionaries entered Hausaland, which was predominantly Muslim. Their converts, for many years, were confined to the people of southern Nigerian extraction resident in the north, and to the large non-Muslim population of the north.¹⁶

A lot of Christians originated from the Southern part of the country. This religion is popular among the Yoruba people of the South-West, Igbo people of the South-South and South-East, Ijaw people of the Southern area and some of the Middle Belt's areas. This is not to say that there are no Christians in the North-East, North-West and North-Central.¹⁷ There are sizeable number of Christians in those areas but not as predominant as Muslims. To show that Nigerians are highly religious, many warehouses, private buildings, event centres are being converted to prayer houses while many stadia are being used for big religious programmes.¹⁸ Many inter-state highways are being blocked on a weekly/monthly basis for worshippers who flock camp grounds for their monthly revivals. There are many churches and mosques as there are streets. Religious activities are not limited to religious houses alone but even extended to government offices, commercial buses and open markets. Religious billboards litter our streets and conspicuous places advertising up-coming crusades and carnivals.

What is Corruption?

Durkheim's submission is that one of the functions of religion is to promote solidarity by affirming the moral superiority of society over its individual members.¹⁹ Religion with all the moral codes being impacted to its members is expected to really sanitize the country as those that are at the helm of affairs are part of their religious affiliations who are involved in one religious activity or the other.²⁰

Corruption is a term that has been perceived in various ways by various scholars. Corruption can be defined as the misuse of public power (by elected politician, appointed civil servant or any other person in the position of one form of authority or the other) for private gain. Thus, corruption is the misuse of entrusted power by heritage, education, marriage, election, appointment or whatever else for private gain.²¹

Corruption as a social problem interests many scholars and others. Ruzindana asserts that corruption in Africa is a problem of routine deviation from established standards and norms by public officials and parties with whom they interact. He also identified the types of corruption in Africa as bribery, private gain, and other benefits to non-existent workers and pensioners (called ghost workers).²² The dishonest and illegal behaviour exhibited, especially by people in authority for their personal gain, is corruption. According to the ICPC Act (section 2), corruption includes vices like bribery, fraud, and other related offences. Corruption is the abuse or misuse of power or position of trust for personal or group benefit (monetary or otherwise)²³.

It is now dawning on the Nigerian public that the so-called private enterprise and legislators are free from scrutiny, and governors claim to be immune. Corruption is found in the award of contracts, promotion of staff, dispensation of justice, and misuse of public offices, positions, and privileges, embezzlement of public funds, public books, publications, documents, valuable security, and accounts. Corruption can be systematic in nature and affect the whole life of an organization, society, town and nation. Clarke outlined the doctrine of the separation of powers, indicating the danger of oppressive and arbitrary rule when single person or institution exercises functions of government.²⁴ The growing corruption in Nigeria can be traced to people holding power at the Federal, State, and Local Government levels. Corruption does not involve just people in government, but also to people in both private and public positions and even traditional rulers.

Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption in Nigeria has become a social institution as this also involves buying and selling. Every Christian appears to be Godly in their daily activities. They can do revivals and speak in tongues before opening their market in the morning but when it gets to market matter, they will put behind them Christianity claiming that this is pure business. There are numerous examples that can be cited to this effect. This corruption has spread widely to the extent that bribery and corruption is so pronounced and has eaten deep into every sector of Nigerian populace. Because of the high rate of corruption in Nigeria, the former president Olusegun Obasanjo presented a bill to the national assembly on “the prohibition and punishment of bribery, corruption, and other related offences bill of 1999”. Obasanjo's regime certainly fired the most critical shot at corruption in Nigeria in his regime.²⁵ The current President, Mohammed Buhari claims that is waging a great war on corruption starting with the politicians that do not belong to his political party and, lately, on Judges. However, he could not absolve himself of corruption because of his partiality and the fact that he (Buhari) himself doubles himself as the Petroleum Minister, and he is recovering looted funds without accountability.

In Africa, it is a major issue and Nigeria is not an exception. Corruption has eaten deeply into the entire fabric of Nigerian life. It has become a household word and has penetrated all strata of Nigerian society. No hierarchy of governance is free from corruption in Nigeria.²⁶ However, Clarke lists the forms of corrupt activities prevalent in Nigeria to include “political corruption, bureaucratic corruption, electoral corruption, embezzlement and bribery”. It is clear that corruption is present in all strata of the Nigerian society. This is evident in the rating of Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations by the Transparency International. This result suggests that oil-producing countries have high rate of corruption indices.²⁷ Thus, a survey has shown that “corruption is highest in oil and gas producing countries. In general, natural resources like oil, gas, diamond and other precious minerals breed corruption, because government cannot live off their export earnings without having to ‘compromise’ with their societies”. A survey conducted in Nigeria shows that “the inflation of government contracts in return for kickbacks, frauds and falsification of accounts in the public service, examination malpractices in our educational institutions, the taking of bribes and perversion of justice among police and other armed forces, the judiciary and other organs for administering justice, over-invoicing of goods, foreign exchange swindling, hoarding and smuggling. At the village level, corruption manifests itself in such forms as adulteration of market goods or denting of measures to reduce their contents with a view to giving advantage to the seller.”²⁸

Corruption in processes of allocating public funds for contracts, grants and hiring; those in charge of making policy decisions can also be critical in determining the level of corruption through incentives that are given to policy makers. Political corruption is the abuse of power, office or resources by elected

government officials for personal gain, by extortion, soliciting or offering bribes. It can also mean office holders maintaining themselves in office in perpetuity. Going by the rating of Transparency International through corruption Perception Index (2002), Nigeria was rated the second most corrupt nation in the world.²⁹

The Church and Educational Development in Nigeria

The first school in Nigeria was started by the Methodist missionaries at Badagry in 1842. This was the work of the great missionary, Thomas Birch Freeman, who placed two missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. De Graft, in charge of the school. Soon after the Methodist experiment, the Church Missionary Society set up their school at Badagry.³⁰

These pioneer mission schools met with a discouraging response. They were closed down in 1852 in favour of schools opened in Lagos which, in 1851, had one time British control. Earlier in 1846, the Rev. Hope Waddell of the Church of Scotland had opened a school at Duke Town, Calabar. Within ten years the C.M.S had opened twelve more schools in what is today Cross Rivers State. By the close of the nineteenth century the major Christian missionary churches had opened elementary schools in many part of southern Nigeria with an enrolment of about 74,000 by the First World War. Soon after the start of elementary schools, the missionaries started opening higher institutions also. Important among these were the Baptist Academy in 1855,³¹ the C.M.S. Grammar School for Boys in 1859, St Gregory's College opened by the Catholics in 1876, Methodist Boys High School 1878 and Methodist Girls' High School 1879. Soon after secondary schools were opened in other parts of southern Nigeria, including Bonny High School, which was taken over by government in 1904.³²

To supplement these missionary efforts in the field of higher education, the government opened its own secondary school in Lagos in 1909, this was King's College. Following agitation by the people in 1934, the government opened the old Yaba Higher College and Medical School, which awarded diplomas acceptable only locally. This instruction in 1948 developed into the University College in Ibadan.³³ The original Yaba College in Lagos has grown into a polytechnic. Predominantly Muslim territory, the North received western education later than the South. By 1914 there were barely thirty schools in that vast area. As happened in Ghana, the development of training colleges in Nigeria was slower than secondary schools, though the C. M. S. had opened the first training college at Abeokuta as far back as 1849.³⁴

The years from 1842 to 1948 constitute a significant period in the history of education in Nigeria. These dates are important because they mark two significant beginnings. The year 1842 marks the beginning of missionary activities in the area of formal education. Up till then, there had been no noteworthy systematic effort of any sort in the formal education in Nigeria. The existing educational programmes including those programmes by which the different cultures in Nigeria have perpetuated themselves, were informal. The only exception was the Qur'anic school which taught mainly the Qur'an.

This period witnessed the arrival of the different missions and the beginning of the initiatives to establish churches and schools. The period emphasizes the relationship that developed between churches and the state in the introduction and development of formal educational institutions in Nigeria. Education established by the missionaries was a driver of development and it produced giants of Nigerian leaders who championed autonomy for independence of Nigeria from the British Colonialists. However, today, corruption and under-funding have weakened this role. The missionaries played a central role in the education sector by teaching ethical values and behavior which modeled the lives of people that passed through them. In today's setting, social trust has been eroded and this has weakened the educational system.

Corruption in Education Sector

Within the education sector in Nigeria, especially from secondary to university levels, corruption is very pervasive, and most of which is not in the public eye.³⁵ Education sector is enmeshed in the corruption saga as this is well pronounced in admission process of candidates to universities and other tertiary institutions.³⁶ Parents perpetrating the act on behalf of their children or wards for admission into Federal Government Colleges and Unity Schools; apart from this, students are fond of looking for miracle centres where they can obtain high marks in Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board's examinations (JAMB) and other allied bodies. There are equally expensive continuing education centres charging exorbitant fees to guarantee a minimum score of 300 marks in the JAMB examinations with the connivance of JAMB officials.³⁷ This is also very pronounced in both West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and National Examinations Council (NECO) as many have distinction results gotten through dubious means in connivance with their parents who pay exorbitantly for their wards to have good results

which they never merit in order to gain admission into higher institutions of learning.³⁸ Some of the tertiary institutions' lecturers are also engrossed in corruption as they also encouraged students who resort to finding ways of obtaining high and unmerited marks from lecturers to enhance the grade in their final examinations. There have been allegations and counter-allegations of harassment of some female students by unscrupulous lecturers that seduce them before they can pass their courses. The National Universities Commission (NUC) accreditation teams are not also left out of this corruption saga due to the fact that the way the team demand for treatment and the kind of hospitality expected to be lavished on the teams by their hosts as it was alleged that this determines their recommendations to the commission.

Corruption and Basic Education in Nigeria

Universal Basic Education Commission is a reform that was launched in 1999 to ensure the quality and access of basic education in which over 13 million Nigerian children who were of school-going-age were not in school.³⁹ This project did not yield any good result because it was alleged that corruption was playing a large role in keeping Nigerian children out of school as there were claims that many politicians have been pocketing the funds meant for this project either through kickbacks or diversion into frivolous projects.

In the Northern States, there are a lot of children who wish to go to school but the schools are not available and even where they are available, there are few or no teachers, lack of infrastructure and manpower to do it. Whereas, a lot of funds have been budgeted to finance construction of schools and to ensure the welfare of teachers,⁴⁰ but all those things are not in place because the fund meant for them had been diverted. Teachers are not motivated, no chalk for writing not to talk of modern day white board and marker, and many dilapidated structures in schools. Education system is in collapsing stage.

The government allocated #605.8 billion to the education sector out of which over #100 billion was given to the Universal Basic Education Commission. In September 2018, an official of State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) which is an offshoot of UBEC was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment for embezzling funds meant for the training of teachers in Benue state which was about #91.5m and also accused for taking a bribe of #14.9m.

Today, sex for marks saga has become rampant in the tertiary institutions whereby female students are using internet facilities (both audio and video) to trap lecturers who are highly immoral. Such were brought into limelight of recent which happened in Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Lagos, University of Benin, Ekiti State University and others. The indicted lecturers were made to face the university's panels and the indicted ones were prosecuted in the law court and sentenced to prisons to serve jail terms.

Causes of Corruption in Education System in Nigeria

The education system in Nigeria has been so corrupted that the degrees being paraded by graduates are being questioned because of the level of the decay in the education system. However, various factors might be responsible for these corruptions which are highlighted below:⁴¹

1. Poor entry qualifications by students
2. Compromising attitude of lecturers
3. Poverty due to low salaries of lecturers
4. Poor study habits of students
5. Poor home background of students

The above points lead to:⁴²

1. Poor quality of university graduates
2. Low morals of students
3. Inability of university graduates to perform tasks
4. Delayed absorption of graduates into labour market
5. Inability of graduates to communicate effectively

However, the following categories of people should carry the blame of corruption in the education sector:⁴³

1. Parents
2. Students
3. Lecturers
4. Administrators
5. Political class

The above sets of people contribute in one way or the other to diminishing standard of university education in Nigeria through aiding and abetting. Nepotism and favouritism lead to poorly qualified

teachers/lecturers being appointed, while corruption can lead to procurement of school textbooks and other supplies of inferiority quality.⁴⁴

Recommendations

The church should organize education summit to discuss this menace that has bedeviled the education sector of Nigeria. Equally, seminars/symposium could be organized with all the stakeholders involved. The government should organize quality control system to fish out corrupt officers and students as well as provide adequate measure of discipline to be meted out to the culprits. Government should give each university governing Council the desired autonomy to admit only the qualified and sound candidates into their various universities.

Furthermore, government should provide adequate facilities for learning in the various institutions of learning in the country that could favourably compete with the developed/developing countries of the world. Finally, the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) and allied bodies should sit up properly to enforce sanctity and sanity in the Nigerian educational system.

Conclusions

The choice before Nigerians is very clear that she either go to war against corruption in all its ramifications or shall soon be consumed by this hydra-headed dragon. In the fight against corruption the Christian religious leaders should do a serious soul-searching. They would have to purge themselves of their acts of complicity in corruption, repent of the evils of the past and make an irrevocable commitment to a life of truth, probity, transparency and accountability in their individual and corporate lives and in churches and institutions. Then they shall have the moral authority to teach their adherents the much-needed lessons in a life of integrity, for as the saying goes, *nemo dat quod non havet* (no one can give to others what he himself does not have).

Christian religious leaders and organizations can assist in turning the hearts of many Nigerians away from what appears to be an incredibly high sense of devotion to the cult of material prosperity and material success towards the spiritual values of truth, justice, holiness and purity. Christian leaders and groups can use the message of the cross to promote a modest and an austere lifestyle that will contradict the crass materialism and extreme economic liberalism of our age which is responsible for the worsening plight of the poor in our country and elsewhere.

The Nigerian Christian Church should set the standard of running corrupt-free institutions of higher learning to serve as pace-setters for government to follow. Furthermore, the church should ensure that her products are corrupt-free people who could raise their head any day, anytime and anywhere. In conclusion therefore, all the stakeholders should determine to work together to stem out corruption from the system while the government should ensure that lecturers are well remunerated in order to bring back sanity into the education sector of Nigeria.

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