

Research Article

The Problem of Corruption in Edo Land: A Theological Response

Izevbigie Augustus Eghe*

Baptist College of Theology, P. O. Box 2380, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

Article History

Received: 01.08.2020

Accepted: 15.08.2020

Published: 20.08.2020

Journal homepage:

<https://www.easpublisher.com/easjhc>

Quick Response Code



Abstract: There is no greater evil in our society today than that which can affect the ware being of others. That the nation Nigeria is riddled with the disease called corruption is a reality. It is noted that corruption may occur in our nation in diverse ways. It has taken different shapes and by different people. The nation is degenerating in the hands of the corrupt leaders in our nation. Our leaders have taken to looting and amassing wealth illegally to the detriment of the nation's development by ignoring their primary duties. It is hoped that if our people are made to realize that we came into this world with nothing we will certainly leave with nothing.

Keywords: Corruption, Theology, Response, Edo State.

Copyright © 2020 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

CORRUPTION

The Hebrew words *mishhāth*, *mashhāth*, and their Greek equivalents, *phthorá*, *diaphthorá*, with numerous derivatives and cognate verbs, imply primarily physical degeneration and decay. It is basically rendered "pit," which means the "pit of nothingness," that is, of destruction. (LUERING). Figuratively, it denotes moral depravity in Gen. 6:11 the Bible says "And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence". Exo. 32:7 stated that "And Jehovah spake unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, that thou broughtest up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves". Corruption here is defined as dishonest exploitation of power for personal gain, extreme immorality or depravity. It is the effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means, personal gain at public expense, or a misuse of public power for personal benefit. Microsoft® Encarta® 2006. In addition, wrongdoing by those in privileged positions of trust can also be considered as corruption. It is a self-benefiting conduct by public officials and others dedicated to public service.

Theology is derived from two Greek words namely: *theos* meaning "God" and *logia* meaning "discuss, study" therefore, theology is the study of God and of God's relation to the world. It is the study of religious faith, practice, and experience. Hinson

(1994:xi), noted that theology is all that God has revealed about himself, about mankind, and about the world, which is contained in the books, the Bible. Commenting further, Guthrie (1968:11), noted that theology literary means "a word from God" which asks questions like these: "what is your only comfort in life and in death?" "What is the chief end of human life?" "What are we by nature?" In whom do we believe?" he summed it up by saying, theology is the quest for the ultimate truth about God, about ourselves and about the World we live in. Theology is seen as the discipline that attempts to express the content of a religious faith as a coherent body of propositions. Microsoft® Encarta® 2006. Theology is narrower in scope than faith, for whereas faith is a total attitude of the individual, including will and feeling, theology attempts to bring to expression in words the elements of belief that are explicitly or implicitly contained in faith. In a paper presented by Aremu (2009:1), titled "An African Christian Theology of Liberation in the context of poverty eradication" noted that theology, as the science about God, has been polarized and conditioned to human experience, politics, history and scientific developments. These have given birth to many contemporary theologies such as: Asian Theology, Modern Theology, Liberation Theology, African Theology and so on.

INTRODUCTION

There is little or no dispute about the fact that corruption is a universal human problem. What may be in dispute are the sources of corruption and the means or ways of alleviating it. Corruption holds sway in Nigerian political terrain, religious circles, and administrative levels. Leaders in almost all areas of life have used methods like bribery, assassination, looting of treasury, and impersonation just to say the least to practice corruption. Some have become famous for vices and not virtue, for wrong and not right, evil and not good. Thus perversion is almost becoming a norm among the ruling class.

The unhealthy but strong desire by people for possession, or more wealth, power, and so on than one actually needs is prevalent in many parts of Africa. These desires constitute a sore point when discussing the issues of leadership, politics, and poverty in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular. People's lives are overtly dominated by their desire for worldly **pleasures**, bodily **comforts**, money, **possessions**, and earthly **achievements** more than things that would have lasting impact on the society or spiritual and eternal values (Turaki, 791). There is no gainsaying the fact that death is inevitable to all humans, and the reality that people are not buried along with their worldly possession. Nevertheless greed persists as a perennial problem. In an article titled "corruption in Nigeria a new paradigm for Effective control," Dike (2005:10), noted that the issue upsurge of corruption in Nigeria is very troubling and the damages it has done to the polity are astronomical and sky-high, thus corruption is the bane of the Nigeria Society. Though corruption is endemic and not peculiar to any government or Society, yet some Countries are more corrupt than others. Theological response to this endemic problem called corruption is the aim of this paper.

AN OVERVIEW OF CORRUPT PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

In the late 1960s and early '70s corruption was an impediment to convincing nonmilitary employers to move into the Phoenix area. Bruce Babbitt, who in the mid-1970s was the state attorney general, warned that not only the Phoenix area but the entire state had earned reputations beyond their borders as dens of vice and crime. Land fraud was common, as was the illegal use of undocumented workers—mostly from Mexico and Central America. Encyclopedia Britannica Obele (2009:3), in a thesis titled "the concept of *havel* meaning vanity in Ecclesiastes and its instructive nature for the contemporary Nigerian political terrain" observed that corruption in Nigeria is not the problem or vice of any particular ethnic, cultural or religious group, but it is a disdainful disease of our rulers and public officers, who through the instrumentality of corruption, accumulates wealth and impoverish the rest

of the society in order to sustain power and control them.

Obele (2009:40), presented the following analyses when she noted that Corruption pervades all levels of government in Nigeria. In 2006 head of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nuhu Ribadu, estimated that Nigeria lost some 380 billion U.S dollars to corruption between independence in 1960 and the end of military rule in 1999. Exact figures are impossible to come by, but some Western diplomats estimate that Nigeria lost a minimum average of 5 billion U.S. dollars to 8 billion U.S dollars per year to corruption over the eight years of Obasanjo administration. This figure would equal between 4.25% and 9.5% of Nigeria's total gross domestic product (GDP) in 2006. Nigeria is estimated to have earned an estimated 223 billion U.S. dollars during the eight years of Obasanjo administration alone, yet between 50 million and 90 million Nigerians live on less than one U.S. dollar a day.

Nihinlola (2009:1), in a paper titled "*A Theology of Human Development: Implications for Solution to poverty in Africa*" submitted that contemporary African life is characterized by poverty in almost every sphere of life; economic, social political and religious. He said that many Africans cannot afford the basic human needs—good food, decent clothing and shelter. There is absence of peaceful co-existence in many African societies due to political, religion and perfidy. He added, quite unfortunately, the religious scene is full of deceit and bigotry or bias. This writer opines that the position taken by Nihinlola can be credited to the act of corruption.

Corruption and the rot in the society persist. In fact, even the anti-corruption war started by former president, Olusegun Obasanjo has been dented by accusations and counter-accusations. Many believe the whole exercise was nothing but witch-hunting of political opponents and disloyal cronies. Only recently, the current Lagos State Governor, Babatunde Raji Fashola criticized the former president over corruption. He said: "history has now revealed it now that those who claimed to be corruption fighters are now the most corrupt people". He argues that when the former president was in power, he accused many of being corrupt and went all out to put such people to shame at all cost." Yet after leaving the office, we can now see who is corrupt."(2).

TYPES OF CORRUPTION

For the purpose of clarity in this paper, corruption has been categorized as follows:

Political Corruption: This could be regarded as the illegal manipulation of activities associated with Government, the fraudulent act connected with the theory and practice of Government, especially the

activities associated with obtaining legislative or executive power, or with forming and running organizations connected with Government. (Microsoft® Encarta® 2006). Political corruption takes place when policy formulation and legislation are tailored to benefit government functionaries.

Bureaucratic Corruption: This is the exploitation of personnel and administrative structure of an organization. This includes business, labour, Religious, Educational, and Governmental Systems that depends on a large workforce arranged in a hierarchy to carry out specialized tasks based on internal rules and procedures. The term bureaucracy is used mostly in referring to Government administration, especially regarding officials in the Federal Government and Civil Service. (Microsoft® Encarta® 2006). This writer wishes to express the fact that it can also involve all other areas where management is operative. In essence, bureaucratic corruption is that which occurs in the public administration or the implementation ends of policies.

Electoral Corruption: This can be regarded as the misuse of the process of election. This includes purchase of votes with money, promises of special favours, coercion, and interference with freedom of election. Other areas include bribery, fraud, embezzlement, extortion, favouritism, nepotism. (Microsoft® Encarta® 2006)

CAUSES OF CORRUPTION

Obele (2009:37), observed the long standing problem of corruption in Nigeria which made the nation to be ranked as the most corrupt country in the World by Transparency International in the year 2001. As a matter of fact, Nigeria is still rated as one of the most corrupt nations of the World. The causes of corruption are tagged as “the Nigeria factor.” The Nigeria factor as a concept covers unhealthy and unsavoury conducts such as dishonesty, fraud, favouritism, ethnicity and tribalism. Awolowo once remarked that since independence, a successive Governments of Nigeria have been a matter of few holding the cow for the strongest and the most cunning to milk”. Furthermore, the causes of flagrant and pernicious graft in the country include: greed, and ostentatious lifestyle, ethnicity and pressures from kinsmen and friends. (37) In the opinion of this writer, the causes of corruption in Nigeria which covers all facets of life include great inequality in distribution of wealth, political office as the primary means of gaining access to wealth, conflict between changing moral codes, the weakness of social and Government enforcement mechanisms, and the absence of strong sense of national community. Other are materialism, compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, glorification and ill-gotten wealth by the general public. However, greed, poor reward system, peer pressure and extended family

pressures, polygamous household, do influence corruption.

Oke (2009:2), noted another cause for corruption as the uneven distribution of resources all over the nation. This explains why many people have more than they need to live in comfort, while many others do not have enough resources to live. In the same vein, Akangbe (2009:6), submitted that corruption is a major problem in the region of Africa, although according to him, it is not limited to Africa. Many ethnic groups in Africa believe that family relationships are more important than national identity, and therefore people in authority often use nepotism and bribery for the benefit of their extended family group at the expense of their nations.

THE EFFECT OF CORRUPTION

The effects of corruption in Nigeria range from poverty to income inequality, social-political and economic underdevelopment. The evils of corruption in Nigeria are indicated by the fact that politics has become a big business in Nigeria where anything spent to secure a political office, administrative position and so on are regarded as investment, which matures immediately one gets into office. Obele, noted that corruption leads to aid forgone by foreign donors, causes a reduction in quality of goods and services available to the public, tarnishes the image of the country, destroys Government structure and capacity, destroys even the legitimacy of a Government, and distort the smooth running of any administration. It diverts scarce public resources into private pockets, literary undermines effective running of any administration, it erodes the social and moral fabric of a people or nation. Furthermore, the far reaching effects of which are ravaging poverty and related social ills like human trafficking, prostitution, armed robbery as well as high rate of unemployment.(32).

In any event, corruption both diverts aid money and foreign investment which is normally sent to offshore banks outside of Africa, and puts a heavy burden on population forced to pay bribes in order to get basic Government services. (6).

THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO CORRUPTION

Wendy E. (2006:62), in an article “Corruption in High Places: Where are Our Wise Men?” *Biblical Studies and Corruption in Africa* examined the role of wise men giving advice at the courts of rulers from the time of Joseph to the time of Daniel. She examines specific accounts of such wise men to show their relevance to contemporary Nigeria. Nigeria is increasing in lawlessness and violence. In the book of Proverbs the characteristics of a good ruler include justice, righteousness, fairness, soberness, and so on.

On the other hand, it focuses on corruption in ruling arising from greed, flattery, or other forms of indulgence such as womanizing. These, the king should avoid (Prov. 23:1-4; 15:27). Ruling with righteousness, the king truly represents God, who cannot be bribed or flattered into partiality. How he does this is found in Proverbs 24:5-6.

A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength. For waging war, one needs guidance and for victory, one needs many advisers. The accounts of both Joseph and Daniel at the courts of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar respectively, are understood from that background. The two accounts are parallels in terms of the young Hebrew being in a foreign environment and the role of a dream. Unlike the accounts of Joseph and Daniel and the court of pagan rulers is the account of the kingship of Solomon, whose reign was characterized by wisdom, and whose reputation of being wise spread and attracted people from different places (I Kings 4:31; 2 Chron. 2:11-12; I Kings 4:34; 10:1-10 etc). The relevance of this to Nigeria lies in the truth that Nigeria needs “wise men” to be at “the king’s court,” or “wise rulers” like Solomon to be on the throne. If there are no wise men to communicate God’s wisdom, rulers will be tempted all the more to give in to bribery and corruption or to approach enchanters, magicians and sorcerers for direction.

Adrian A. (2009:12-33), in his article titled “The Ten Biblical Commandments for Fighting Corruption in Africa,” *Biblical Studies and Corruption in Africa* outlined what he called ten biblical commandments for fighting corruption in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. These commandments derive, not from a detailed exegetical investigation of a particular text instead it draws from relevant passages to combat the several facets of corruption in Nigeria commonly practiced in many other African countries. The Ten Commandments are:

1. You shall not commit bribery: Dealing with the issue of bribery, it is the giving a gift to someone to encourage him or her to grant a favour. In Exo. 23:8 and Deut. 16:19b, state “do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.” Bribery takes some form such as: giving the policeman something so that he will not delay you on your journey. Paying a Judge so that he will rule in your favour. Giving the clerk something so that he will process your paper quickly (Adrian 14)
2. You shall not commit extortion: According to Adrian (15-16), when a person in authority demands a bribe, extortion occurs. Bribe is normally giving voluntarily. But when someone in authority uses force, it becomes extortion. For instance, a policeman who refuses to allow a driver to proceed until he or she pays a bribe. “Nail boys” who claim to collect revenue on behalf of a state or local government area.
3. You shall not commit nepotism: On the issue of nepotism, it is giving unfair preference to one’s relatives or others in the distribution of public positions, favours or property. It is a form of favoritism. For example, when a government official awards a contract to a “brother,” when a better qualified contractor is available. Again, a school principal hires members of her own family to teach in her school, though they are not as qualified as the other applicants (Adrian 17-18)
4. You shall not practice tribalism: there is a thin line between tribalism and nepotism. Tribalism is giving unfair preference to members of one’s own tribe or ethnic group in the distribution of jobs and resources. For example, Government positions are distributed on the basis of tribal or religious quotas, rather than on the basis of qualification.
5. You shall not commit educational fraud: This type of fraud is evident in admission process, it is seen during examinations, and it is practiced in the classroom. This occur when a teacher/lecturer gives out his or question to certain persons before the examination.
6. You shall not have poor work practices: This is evident in many different ways and example are obvious such as: Arriving at work late and leaving early. Using the organization’s phone for personal affairs. Sleeping on the job. This is sometime due to laziness, but often because there is no real work. Engaging in personal affairs during office hours.
7. You shall not be dishonest in business: many persons in Nigeria believe that business and honesty cannot be combined though not true. Some engage in business in so many dishonest ways such as: using false measuring devices. Using false containers to reduce the volume of content. Petrol stations modifying their meters or sell substandard fuel for the same reason. Some persons manipulate their account in other to reduce their taxes or to cover fraud.
8. You shall not misuse government property: Whenever we use things that belong to others without their permission, it is a form of theft. People often assume that whatever belongs to state is public property and can thus be used by anyone. They do not realize that state property is a trust and they are only stewards. They do this by demanding kickbacks on government contracts and such kickbacks add to the price of the project and reduce the quality control. They divert public fund for their own use.
9. You shall not commit political crimes: these are crimes committed by people in position of authority and power as a result they enjoy immunity from arrest and persecution. Some examples of this kind of crime are: Politicians who buy votes and manipulate the election returns in

order to ensure their own election. Again, legislators who accept payments in return for voting for certain candidates or for legislation that the government wants passed. Also, politicians who use their political immunity in order to cover up major crimes.

10. You shall not show favoritism: as noted by Adrian, all of us sometimes show favoritism and, in turn, expect others to do so to us. Rich people are not the only ones who expect special treatment. This too is a form of corruption, however, it is a subtle one that is easily overlooked. Sad to say, wealthy and influential people are treated differently from the poorest and weakest members of society; the saying, "It's not what you know, but who you know," is true everywhere (Adrian 19-29)

These commandments are not easy to keep for reasons ranging from moral laxity of many Christians to the faulty societal structures, but observance of those laws will bring about a better society. It is, indeed, infuriating, exasperating and frustrating to know that few persons loot and hoard wealth belonging to the whole nation, with flagrant disregard for the welfare of the whole. Sadly, the religious and political terrain today seem to constitute men and women who either ignore the fact of mortality of all humans, or are unaware of this reality.

In order to respond to this cancerous disease that has eaten deep into the fabric of the nation, the following questions are of paramount importance. "Do these people who are involved in corrupt practices as a lifestyle live forever? Are they ignorant of the fact of death? Do they see others buried along with their possessions? Do they know the day of their deaths? How should they live their lives with regard to cancerous attachment to wealth amassing and accumulation, sheer greed and gluttony, despite the fact of mortality of all humans?"

Those in charge of governance and administration of society, politically, religiously, and socially whether by election, selection, appointment, whether through the right means or by "hook or crook" should know or be reminded that all the luxuries and pleasures of life including all affluence and worldly possessions are but ephemeral or momentary. Eccl. 12:13. Says "Fear God and obey His commandments, for this is the duty of every person".

It should be stated clear here that all those who hoard and amass wealth on earth with sheer greed and covetousness should know that they are living in ignorance and spiritual darkness. Jesus Christ has taught that men ought to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness and other things will follow (Matt. 6:33). Also he said, "Do not store up treasures here on earth,

where they can be eaten by moth and get rusty, and where thieves, break in and steal" (Matt. 6:19).

According to Obele (2009:26), the mention of death as the ultimate proof of the folly of a life spent trying to amass wealth leads to the call for the leader to enjoy the few days he has under the sun. Some important points here are: (1) Life is wasted when it is spent in a quest for more money; worse than that, it is followed with anger and gloom (5:16-17). (2) To be able to rightly and fully enjoy the things of this world is a gift of God's grace and those who receive this gift are free from corrupt practice.

Ministers should stand their ground to preach that embezzled money either in the religious, political, or public office and ill-gotten property no matter how much they are, do not last forever. Wealth does not satisfy the desire it raises, and often is the ruin of its possessor. This does not imply that wealth in itself is evil. Wealth especially money has great advantages and confers on its owner certain privileges such as influence and power, and the ability to live comfortably. Yet, one must have the right attitude toward wealth. How wealth is viewed and the sources of such wealth are important.

The public should be enlightened by the Christian leaders that looted treasury amounts to ill-gotten wealth and does not constitute God-given wealth. God gives wealth through hard work or sometimes with some kinds of fortune or miraculous provision, but money stolen from public coffers is not God-given as it violates the eighth commandment which says "thou shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15). Indeed, it should be stated loud and clear that the expensive wears, phones, the flashy cars, business interest all over the world, choice properties in major cities, sexual orgies and so on, that characterize the lifestyles of Nigerian office holders are all temporary. Thus, the Bible says in Eccl. 2:1, "I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure'; but surely this is also vanity". Again, "I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, I built myself houses and planted myself vineyards, Yes I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me" (Eccl. 2:3-15). His conclusion, "then I said in my heart, 'this is also vanity.'"

CONCLUSION

It is a truism that the majority of the populations of our nation Nigeria are professing Christians or Muslims who either read and revere the Bible or recite and revere the Quran. This being the case, the question that comes to mind is "are there not found in these sacred books truths and principles that should guide these men and women on how they should live their lives with regard to cancerous attachment to wealth amassing and accumulation, sheer greed and

gluttony, and to sum it up corruption despite the fact of mortality of all humans? It is a fact that there are corrupt leaders in the religious, political, and civil services but it is not without sincere and genuine ones amidst them. However these faithful and genuine ones should be encouraged to speak out against the disease called corruption in the political and religious settings without fear or favour. Furthermore, those who have yielded themselves to corruption be challenged to learn from the doom of those who because of corrupt practices ended their lives in ruin and in disgrace.

REFERENCE

1. _____ "Corruption" © 1993-2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
2. _____ "Electoral Corruption" © 1993-2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
3. _____ "Political Corruption" © 1993-2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
4. Britannica, E. (2009). "Theology" Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica 2009 Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.
5. Dike, V. E. (2010). "Corruption in Nigeria: A New Paradigm for Effective Control." *Africa Economic Analysis*. www.africaeconomicanalysis.org 2005. Accessed 10 September.
6. Emiola, N. (2009). "A Theology of Human Development: Implications for Solution to Poverty in Africa", A Seminal Paper Presented at the Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso.
7. Encyclopedia Britannica. (2009). "Phoenix." *Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica 2009 Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.
8. Fehintola, A.M. (2009). "Poverty and Problem of Theological Development in Africa", A Paper Presented During NBTS Ogbomoso Theological Education Week, Oyo: March 26-27.
9. Guthrie, S. C. (1968). *Christian Doctrine: teaching of the Christian Church*. Virginia: CLC Press.
10. Helleman, A. A. (2016). "The Ten New Biblical Commandments for Fighting Corruption in Africa." *Biblical Studies and Corruption in Africa*. NABIS.
11. Helleman, W. E. (2006) "Corruption in High Places: Where are Our Wise men?" *Biblical Studies and Corruption in Africa*.
12. Hinson, D. F. (1976). *Theology of the Old Testament: Old Testament Introduction 3*. Cambridge: University Press.
13. Luering, H. L. E. (2009). *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Encyclopedia Britannica 2009 Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.
14. Microsoft ® Encarta. (2006). "Bureaucratic Corruption" © 1993-2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
15. Obele, U. M. (2009). "The Concept of Hevel in Ecclesiastes and Its Instructive Nature for the Contemporary Political Terrain." A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Biblical Studies Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso and the Department of Religious Studies University of Jos, June.
16. Oke, R. O. (2009). "The Contemporary Church and Poor in the Light of 11 Corinthian 9" A Paper presented at the Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso, Oyo: March 26-27.
17. Oyeshile, O. (2009). "Poverty Alleviation and Democratic Governance in Africa", A Seminal Paper Presented at the Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso, Oyo.
18. Tunde, A. (2009). "An African Christian Theology of Liberation in the Context of Poverty Eradication," A Paper Presented During Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso. Theological Education Week, Ogbomoso: March 26-27.
19. Turaki, Y. (2006). "Secularism and Materialism." *Africa Bible Commentary*. Ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo. Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006.
20. Wikipedia. (2010). "Political Corruption in Nigeria." *Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia*. www.wikipedia.org/wiki/corruption-in-Nigeria October 9, 2008. Accessed 10 September 2010.