



Nigeria and the Problem of Corruption: Is the Church Helping?

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country in West Africa and the “lion of Africa” in general. Though it has nothing tangible to prove it. Gone are the days when the country was doing well, when the leaders’ aim was to uplift the country instead of looting the country. Then, leaders were known for their uprightness, unity in diversity and progress for all. These days, the leaders are characterized by selfishness, corruption, segregation, divide and rule, lopsided appointments that are not even based on expertise, all in the name of favouritism, and brotherliness. The economic crisis that bedeviled the country today is not spiritual but manmade. All these lead to the belief that corruption thrives among political leaders in Nigeria. This work, while aiming at analyzing corruption in Nigeria, will look at how the church is helping in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The findings of the work showed the church is doing her bit in fighting corruption although a lot is still required of her if corruption is to be stamped out in Nigeria.

Keywords: Leadership, Corruption, Segregation, Lopsided

Introduction

Nigeria for some time now, has been living on the past glory built by her heroes that fought for the progress and prosperity of all her citizens. They were dedicated. Each leader was capable and productive in their various positions. They were eager to deliver rather than to impoverish the country. Achebe in Asogwa (2020:1), commenting on the problem of corruption in Nigeria, blamed it all on bad leadership. He argued thus:

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

Bad leadership has led Nigerians into hardship, insecurity, unemployment, corruption, half-baked education etc. It has affected every sphere of life. Old time politicians have transferred corruption to the youth. It is now a seeming way of life in the country. Few of the youth that are opportune to be leaders in various capacities, portrayed the same corrupt leadership style. Even at 61st independence anniversary, it was obvious that the myriad of unnerving socio-economic and security challenges has made it increasingly difficult for the country to realise her potential for greatness (This Day, 2021). This is a bad omen for the entire country and the outside world look at us as a country with little to hope for the future. As the country journeys into the future, we should do the needful in order to enthrone good governance in the country (Ehiaghe, 2018). According to Jega, the failure of the successive governments in the country to handle her diversity well has degenerated into disturbing security challenges in the country (Ojo, 2021). Bad leadership has been Nigeria’s greatest problem as regards her management of diversity as well. Any day the right leader is elected in the positions of power, everything will work out well. It will no longer matter who is at the centre once we elect the right leaders (Alarbe, 2017). To show how corruption has overwhelmed Nigeria, the present Buhari’s led government at the inception was seen as one that will fight corruption in the country since they campaigned on the fight against corruption as one of its aims. Based on this, fear gripped all the opponents with this leading to carpet crossing to the ruling party, All Progressive Congress (APC). Joining the ruling party seemed the only remedy that will certify the person non-corrupt and you will not be prosecuted. It was even argued that when PDP members who are heavyweights with huge electoral value and “deep pocket, defected to the APC, their ‘sins’ were forgiven’ and in some instances, the corruption cases against them quietly take the backseat.

A good example was the withdrawal of the ₦5bn corruption case against Danjuma Goje by Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation, Abubakar Malami, in 2019 reminded one the statement made by former national chairman, Adams Oshiomhole, that when people join the APC, their sins were forgiven (Ajaja, 2022). This singular act was one of the misrule that led to the fall of Buhari's administration. This injected more corrupt politicians into APC and that showed that the regime was not sincere to fight corruption in the country. However, the case of Magu, the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) boss, that people believed initially was fighting corruption, calls to mind here. He was corruption personified as he was exposed and arrested. He was accused of mishandling the recovered loot and selling seized assets to his associates. Also, he was accused of failing to remit ₦48 billion loot recovered in foreign and local currencies (Sahara Reporters, 2022). Imagine, a person appointed to fight corruption was caught at the web of corruption itself. It was a symbol of greed, wickedness and insincerity of discharging of duty which he took oath to work for the interest of the people. Our politicians and appointees that head various ministries and departments cause the actual economic crises in the country.

A good example of failed appointee that still ring bell in the ears of Nigerians is the former Account General of the Federation that was arraigned for looting ₦109bn (Ameh, 2022). The most annoying part of it was that this was uncovered when the Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU) was on strike because of poor funding of universities, poor salary etc. At this period, the federal government was saying that the country had no money. The above two instances are failure in governance and a clear indication of bad representative in offices. Furthermore, most of the times, Nigerians wake up and hear different versions, funny or unbelievable stories when it comes to corruption. It is only in Nigeria, that animals are being accused of swallowing or eaten up financial documents. In 2013, the documents that contained the detailed expenditure of the Nigeria social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) in the tune of ₦17.1billion were alleged to have eaten up by termites. Nigerians were trying to recover from such malicious story when in 2018, Philomena Chrieshe, a staff of the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) in Benue State claimed that a snake had swallowed above 36million Naira being proceeds from the sales of scratch cards (Ebirim and Adesoji, 2018). In 2019, a gorilla was accused of swallowing ₦6.8million in the Kano Zoological Gardens, Shehu Sani in 2018, stated that the sum of ₦17million which was given to Abdullahi Adamu under Northern Forum was swallowed by monkeys at the leader's forum (Abiodun, 2022). All these stories that show the true level of corruption in Nigeria. This work therefore studies the problem of corruption in Nigeria to show how the church fits into the picture. The work utilises the descriptive approach to its discussion, and recommends that the church should step up her game in the fight against corruption in Nigeria, its present efforts notwithstanding.

Factors Responsible for Bad Leadership in Nigeria

Many factors are responsible for the crime of corruption in Nigeria.

(a) Mindset of office holders/politicians

In Nigeria, many office holders or political appointees see their positions as avenues to loot the national cake. They see it as an avenue to embezzle and not even to work or serve the masses. Even if these people decided not to loot money, family members, friends and

acclaimed well wishes including party faithful, will tell them the need to loot money for rainy days when they are out of the office. One of the severest test of great and upright leader is his or her ability to tell his followers the truth even when the consequences are severe to their personal position of power and influence (Anueyiagu, 2022). It is now as a tradition in Nigeria that anyone placed in the position of authority must try to loot unless there is nothing to loot, be it a young or an old person.

(b) The Electorates

In every democratic system of government, it is the full rights of the citizenry to elect who becomes the president, governors, lawmakers, local government chairmen, and councilors. The bad governance that we witnessed years back, is still with us now. For the country to move forward the electorates should stand against political selection of leaders in the country. This is why an elder statesman Edwin Clerk has urged the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to demonstrate lessons learnt from its recent crises by jettisoning impunity and imposition that characterised its previous activities. Leadership should not be based on tribe, rotational or imposition of a particular candidate by one person or few persons against the wish of all. How can incumbent governor alone hand pick his successor, chairman of a local government and also be responsible for selection of delegates that vote for primary election. In the words of George Jean Nathan (1882–1958) "bad leaders are elected by good people who do not vote". If the electorates in Nigeria vote in an election, there are chances that the habit of imposition of hand-picked leaders would stop.

Moreover, when the masses fail to register for their permanent voters cards (PVCs) or do not have, they have totally disqualified themselves from voting in the right person. PVC is a requirement for voting, as provided for in section 47 of the Electoral Act, 2022 (Premium Times, 2022). Although previously, rigging was part of the Nigerian election, nevertheless, with the introduction of the electoral act 2022, rigging has been murdered in the country (Sahara, 2022). The recent electoral laws have proved that election can no longer be rigged as before. The increased awareness and desire of many Nigerians to partake in the forthcoming 2023 general election, by so doing to overthrow corruption and, bad governance and rigging, there was a surge in voters' card registration (Guardian 2022). This is a welcome development towards electing good and credible leaders instead of the choice of the few. Most often, leadership failure in Nigeria can be traced through the led. Hence, to address the problem of leadership failure, there must be need for the additional changes through mass participation in election and voting, in order to enthrone good leadership (Ochilar, 2021).

(c) Rigging of Election

Rigging of election means manipulation of election results or voters fraud in other to favour a particular candidate that cannot win in an election. The most cause of bad leadership is rigging. Any election that is free and fair, the vote of the masses counts with most credible candidates are being enthroned into power to reflect the mind or choice of the electorates. Nevertheless, if it becomes otherwise, rigging has been taken place. This is not new in the Nigerian election terrain. According to Sardaina (2022) for example, the former vice president Atiku, accused the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of rigging the 2019 elections for the ruling All

Progressive Congress (APC) in five states of Kastina, Kano, Yobe, Kaduna and Borno. Though rigging does not only take place during general election but during primary election Nigerians are aware of how politicians bribed the delegates this 2022 to elect who will be the president down to the state house of assemblies. It is undemocratic to use few party faithful called delegates from states to decide who will win presidential, national assemblies, governors etc. Political parties in Nigeria should abolish the method of having delegates during primary election to ensure the emergence of right candidates (Vanguard, 2022). The whole primary election conducted this year was a failure, and a means of “baptised” way of corruption. In this context, it is the highest bidder that wins instated of the most credible candidate. Rotimi Amechi, a presidential candidate of APC stated that delegates who voted at the APC primaries were bribed to influence the outcome of the convention. During this process, many of the best candidates lost because they could not afford to buy their delegates, while some committed to never buy delegates, therefore losing to the highest bidder (Oseni, 2022). A politician who bought his way to be elected will definitely try to recover and make enough gain of what he/she spent and it is the public treasure that will bear the brunt in the end (Daily Trust, 2022). It is too bad. During the Presidential primary election of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the delegates were bribed with each receiving \$15,000 dollars from Nyesom Wike, Atiku, 20,000 dollars; Olusola Saraki, 10,000 dollars and Aminu Tanbuwal, 10,000 dollars, summed to \$50,000 dollars (Sahara Reporters, 2022). All these money transactions are in a bid to bribe party delegates and impose a candidate that may not be the right man to win the presidential election.

(d) Government’s inability to punish offenders

Due to the bad style of administration, the government’s inability to punish the past leaders who were corrupt, have paved the way for the sitting or the incoming leader to join suite. One cannot give what one does not have. You cannot be a bad and corrupt leader and fight others. Birds of a feather flock together. Many past leaders have led the country astray. Okafor, a former commissioner for finance in Imo State and House of Representatives said that the fight against corruption in the country could not work with corrupt people on helm of affairs (Vanguard, 2015). To show how this works, at the inception of President Buhari’s regime, many past governments, especially the PDP’s defunct regimes, were afraid that they would be prosecuted. Some government officials voluntarily returned the fund to the federal government’s coffers, part of the public funds they acquired illegally (Premium, Times, 2015). Buhari’s government would have been the best regime so ever that fought corruption and government but was selective in fighting corruption and even the opposition who knew that he had hand in corruption carpet crossed to the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) and all his “sins” are forgiven and forgotten. The government of the day, which was believed to fight corruption, therefore became caught in the web. Majority of the masses lost hope on the present administration and its methodology in fighting corruption (Asogwa, 2021).

Many people looted the nations’ treasury but were not punished. Even those who were caught and claimed to have been prosecuted, did not seem to have had a drastic action taken against them while some are

granted bail or discharged without seizure of their property frozen of their accounts. A good example was the release of former governors of Plateau and Taraba States, Joshua Dariye and Jolly Nyame, on health ground and good behavior through a federal government pardon (This Day, 2022). This act is encouraging others that fighting of corruption/bad leaders is not a serious business. According to Ituma and Asogwa (2018:126) “successive governments have tried to punish the corrupt ones but when looked deep into it, they are only punishing their political opponents. The anti-corruption agencies are not performing well because they are being tale-guided by the president. Any serious government that is determined to fight corruption should keep sentiments aside and do the needful.

(e) Godfatherism

One of the causes of bad leadership is godfatherism. The politics of godfatherism in the country has caused many citizens to suffer since the so-called ‘king-makers’ bring people of their choice in to political offices. If Nigerians can liberate themselves from the shackles of godfathers, the country will be a better place. Our politics will be free from the orchestrated control of men who sit on their couches dictating who should be governor or senator (Daily Trust, 2020). There are usually terms and conditions between the godfather and the godson and in this area, the masses rights, privileges and dividend of democracy are denied. The citizenry ends up being impoverished due to a leadership that is totally disconnected from the aspirations of the people as produced by a flawed system (Babalola, 2021). When this takes place, state funds which would have been used for the development and running of the affairs of the government are usually diverted to service the godfather. The godson will not perform any serious function without the approval of the godfather. Most times, appointment and execution of functions will be tele-guided by the godfather. Merit in anything will be relegated to the background, thereby enthroning corruption and mediocrity.

(f) Poverty

It is believed that Nigerians since independence have not witnessed acute poverty like these few years. Hunger, occasioned by poverty, pervaded the country and served as bait to lure the young ones into various crimes. A country that its leaders failed to practice equity and justice, where there is economic crisis, the poor man is confronted with hunger (Shobayo, 2022). Poverty and hunger can lead to any form of crime in the society. Due to current economic recession, tough times have resulted in job losses and hunger-induced crimes like kidnapping to bank robbery, vandalism, burglary and internet fraud among several other nefarious acts which have put security operatives on their toes (Usman and Igata, 2016). Crime is on the increase day in day out. According to Ajimotokan (2022), the current crippling economic challenges in the country have forced Nigerian youths into internet fraud, armed robbery, illegal migration for sex work, banditry and terrorism, cultism, political thuggery, oil bunkering, human rituals and organ trafficking etc. By implication, any poor Nigerian who finds themselves in political office sees it as a source of enrichment. This where poverty causes bad leadership as much as it (poverty) is the outcome of bad leadership.

(h) Economy

Bad leadership has affected the economy to the extent that the country is under recession. Poor leadership is the responsibility of economic quagmire that has put every Nigeria on the suffering side. Our so-called leaders who are selfish, who are not selfless narrowed vision in terms of how this country can develop, they lack the capacity to be classified as leaders (Sardauna, 2021). None of our leaders is there to serve the masses but rather to impoverish the masses and thereby amass the wealth of the country. Gone are the days when politicians make good names for themselves. The absence of efficient and effective political leadership in Nigeria has been the main significant impediment to the growth and development of the country. It is believed that why Nigeria's economy or development remained stunted is issue of failure of our leaders in distributing the country's resources poorly. According to Komolafe (2022) bad government is the main reason why the various national development plans failed to deliver on the objectives of massive employment and improved economic development. On the other hand, the high rate of corruption in Nigeria is another reason why the economy is poor. The fund which would have been used for development and the running of the affairs of day-to-day governance are being looted by politicians and the high-ranking civil servants.

If the leaders of the country piloted the affairs of the country in the right direction, Nigerians will not be complaining of unemployment, hardship, insecurity, etc. There has been the issue of wrong investment by political leaders over the years. The much, which should have been used to invest rightly and develop the country and reduced the suffering of the poor, few ranking politicians have looted. This has left the masses mired in poverty. Corruption stifle economic growth; reduces economic efficiency and development despite the enormous resources in the country (Ola et al, 2014). The problem with Nigerians is not having enormous resources but bad leaders who failed make judiciously use of their resources available for the development of the country. The politicians, instead of making use of what we have, decided to loot and squander, with impunity, the treasury of the country. If the money looted in this country was channeled towards development, Nigeria would have been a new heaven. The economy cannot grow when the corrupt leaders failed in the management of the resources and lacked the capacity and courage to plug loopholes in the economy (Premium Times, 2013).

(i) Nigerian Constitution

Some part of the constitution of Nigeria needs to be amended in order to bring about good and credible governance. For the constitution to provide immunity for the President, Governors, House of Assembly etc, should be looked into or amended. That is the major reasons why good governance is yet to be achieved in this country. The leaders who failed to rule the country in a positive way should be brought to book while still in power in order to take correction. Without doing that, there will be always bad ruler ship and right of the masses will not be protected in full. If leaders should be challenged while in and after the office, politician will retrace their steps and work towards establishing good leadership in the country.

Others intending to rule the country will learn lessons on how to move the country forward.

The Church and Nigerian Leadership Woes

The church exists in a country to be its moral eye so to say. Although there has been an argument on the role of the church as regards politics, it is believed that the church has a moral obligation to call corrupt leadership to order in the society. In a country like Nigeria where corruption has become a norm, the question then becomes how well has the church done in the fight against corruption. The answer is a mixed bag of answers.

As many Nigerian leaders belong to a particular church, it is the duty of the leaders of the church to direct the followers to the right part. The church is known for sincerity, truthfulness, dedication and service of mankind etc. The church should try to stand on her feet and say no to some things when it comes to money. Most of the times, when the leaders of the church are sourcing for money, they invite many politicians to make some donations knowing fully well that the money given to them are the same gotten through looting. However, on a positive note, there have been cases of leaders of the church standing up to the corrupt monies of politicians. An example is the Nsukka Anglican Diocese that was bold enough to reject 2million 'kola money given to them by the People's Democratic Party in Enugu State (Olu, 2022). The reason for such a rejection was that it was against the principles of the church. If not that the church rejected such an offer, she would have been bought over by politicians. The clergy, no matter the rank should be cautious politics, particularly as played in Nigeria. The leaders of the church should not practice what may be called the collusion of politics with religion. If the church severe herself from the entanglement of politics, which most times leaves her without the moral right to speak against the excess corruption in the country, then she can fight corruption to some point. Therefore, while the paper argues that the church has a moral obligation to fight corruption in the country; it does not deny that the church has done some bit in trying to fight corruption in Nigeria. What it argues is that the church needs to engage political leaders more to see how corruption can be reduced. The problem of corruption cannot be tolerated as its excess as it is today in Nigeria. The church and her leaders still have a lot to do in this regard particularly in the area of allowing corrupt politicians entice her with monetary donations and offers.

Conclusion

Nigerians have no other problem be it political, economic, insecurity, corruption, other than bad governance. This bad governance/leadership has wrecked Nigeria in every angle and that is the main reason everyone in the country is suffering today. On a whole, there is a huge problem with corruption in Nigeria today. This is where the church comes in picture. As the moral eye of the nation, the church should take drastic action against politicians who happen to be members of the church by rejecting some of their donations and gifts. She should also discourage them from looting public funds for their own selfish end. The church should preach boldly against the politician's way of life that is not in line with the church's principles. The church should not leave politics and governance in the hands of

politicians alone but they should participate and change the narrative. This does not mean the church should be entangled with partisan politics in Nigeria.

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