



THE CHURCH AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the role of the Church in the re-injection of morality and ethics into the fight against corruption. It also explored the causes of church passivity and inadequacy in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The study used Max Weber's framework of functional-structuralism in which there is little or no separation between religion, morality, ethics and state, but all contributing together towards achieving a whole. Also, it has adopted the instrumentalist approach which sought for a causal relationship between complex social phenomena and corruption. Findings from the study revealed the attempts made at separating religion from morality, personal and social morality, state functions and ecclesial missions as false dichotomy. Religion remains the source of morality. Church role appeared passive and inadequate considering public expectations and demands for a fall in the rate of corruption in the country. The Church does not fight corruption with carnal weapons instead it engages members in a spiritual warfare; while exercising patience with corrupt persons, desiring to see them return to God. The church in its attempt to meet public expectations appears hypocritical: speaking against corrupt practices perpetrated by public officials in Nigeria without first fighting against the corruption within. This study argued that both the Church and the State must fight corruption through moral re-injection and moral regeneration. The role of the Church in fighting corruption in Nigeria will be effective when it starts the fight from within as things are so twisted in Nigeria; teaching members how to be simple and straight forward in the way they do things with others.

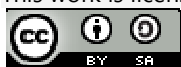
Keywords: Church, Fight, Corruption, Nigeria.

Introduction

“... why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye” (Matt. 7:3-5 RSV).

“For what have I to do with judging those outsiders? Is it not those inside the Church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside, drive out the wicked person from among you” (1 Cor. 5:12-13 RSV).

Corruption seems to be the bane of Nigeria's society and successive administrations have attempted to eradicate the monster from the fabric of the Nigerian society since 1957 till date. It seems all efforts have proved unsuccessful and the Church is looked up to at different times for assistance in combating the menace because the nation needs the assistance of God in the fight against corruption. The inclusion of religious leaders in the fight against corruption has generated a debate among scholars in the social sciences. Some argue that religion maintains a primordial role holds on people's values, attitudes and behaviour that democratic institutions simply do not





end as such, it remains an important potential source of power (Marquette, 2010). Such scholars saw the Church as an agent of socialization which must be at the forefront of rebuilding societal value system, and making the individual to imbibe such values and moral principles. They have identified morals, ethical and attitudinal failure and discrimination as the main problems of society.

Some other scholars have argued that religion and morality are not the same while state functions and church functions are equally not the same. They hold with Emile Durkheim view that religion is more of a reflection of social morality than a source of it. According to them social standards proscribe actions which in general are harmful to the social group. Corruption then is a violation of a social standard; but religious stands emphasises abstinence. Therefore within religion, violations of spiritual standards such as infidelity, idolatry, distortion of sacred scriptures maybe held spiritually harmful to the perpetrator. For such scholars violation of spiritual standards is usually not directly or obviously harmful to the social group, therefore religious standards do not have less persuasiveness to the secularly oriented individual (*Marquette 2010*).

On the separation between state functions and church functions in human society, these scholars have argued that the mission of the Church cannot be put in the same category with that of the state. For them the criteria of the church's mission do not originate from the state but from God. The gospel and church's mission are above all cultures and human authorities. Fighting corruption and promoting the nation,s unity are the functions of the state and not the Church. The state fights corruption and promotes unity in the nation through a workable political structure and system, strong functioning state political institutions and rule of law and order (*Anekwe, 2017*). According to Anekwe , the involvement of citizens of the State in government efforts to sanitize its financial sector through the anti-corruption graft and to promote the unity of the Nation is a good idea. However, it is altogether a different thing, when those in the corridors of power want to corrupt the Church and its leaders to assume that state function and ecclesial mission in the country are the same.

From the over view of literature, it is clear that the difficulties faced by the state and religious institutions in the fight against corruption are caused by the confusion created by several attempts made to separate religion and morality and power between the Church and the State. The contentions, over the definitions of corruption and methodological approaches used in the study of the discursive relationship between religion and corruption are yet other problems. Some scholars adopted rationality and secularism as an institutionalized approach to corruption. For them the relationship between religion and corruption is based on assumptions and perceptions which are not borne out by empirical evidence. The definition of corruption used is the abuse of public office for private gain (World Bank, 1997. P8). This definition has moved morality, ethics and religion away from corruption as a problem of personal or social morality to one where a problem is instead a question of inadequate institution (Marquette, 2010).





Attempts made at separating religion and morality or state functions from religious functions denigrate the role of religions in fighting corruption and other social vices. The separation between religion and morality, personal or social morality is a false dichotomy. Also the debate on whether the Church should be involved in the fight against corruption or not is senseless; Religion remains the source of morality. Ethics and morality cement the persons and institutions. Any relationship that exists between religion and morality explains the type of relationship between religion and society. Such relationship is always inseparable. Whatever affects society equally affects religion. The church is a microcosm of society therefore corruption that infects society equally infects the Church. This study argued that both the Church and state must fight corruption through moral reinjection or moral regeneration.

The study used Max Weber's framework- structural functionalism in which there is little or no separation between religion, morality, ethics and the state, but all contributing together towards achieving a whole. We join with advocates of the reinjection of religion, morality and ethics into the definition of the fight against corruption. This is because corruption can only be understood in terms of its multi-dimensionality. The study used the instrumentalist approach that seeks for causal relationship between complex social phenomena and corruption.

The paper explored the causes of Church passivity and inadequacy in the fight against corruption in Nigeria arguing that the divide in Christianity along the lines of Active and Contemplative Asceticism has made the Church appear hypocritical, speaking against corruption in public domain without first eradicating the distorted gospel and preachers within it. The Church is exposed to public criticism such as quoted in *Matthew 7:3-5* above.

Church perspectives of corruption and methods used in fighting the menace are different from that of secular institutions. Nevertheless, the Church as an institution in the society must perform its latent functions. After all, it is described as the salt of the earth (*Matthew 5:13*) meaning that it is valuable as salt to give flavor to society and preserve it from decay. Again the Church is seen as light (*Matthew 5:14-15*), that shines, illuminates society and dispels darkness. One way of maintaining Church integrity in a decaying society such as Nigeria is to be actively engaged in the fight against corruption, exposing and disciplining corrupt persons within it, while desiring to see them return to God. The safety of Nigeria from the menace of corruption will start with the safety of the Church from distorted gospel and false preachers.

Corruption and Nigeria

Corruption in Nigeria is endemic. There are many types of corruption such as Political-leadership corruption, Economic corruption, Ethical/moral corruption and Religious corruption. Although moral, ethical and religious corruption cannot be treated without political and economic corruption in a country like Nigeria; the focus of this study is on religion, moral and ethical corruption.

Marquette (2010) succinctly argued that when Nigeria talks about corruption, they refer not only to the abuse of state offices for some kind of private gain but also to a whole range of social





behaviour in which various forms of morally questionable deception enable the achievement of wealth, power or prestige as well as more mundane ambitions. Nigerian notion of corruption encompasses everything from government bribery and graft, rigged elections, and fraudulent business deals to the diabolical abuse of occult powers, medical quackery, cheating in school and even deceiving a lover, rapping of young boys and girls (mine), distortion of the gospel of Christ and the apostles (mine).

Corruption means dishonest or illegal behaviour, especially of people in authority. It is the act or effect of making somebody change from moral to immoral standards of behaviour. A change from original form (moral) in some way to (immoral) in some way (Hornby, 2000). The World Bank (1996) defined corruption as “the abuse of public power for private benefit”. The Transparency International (2005) defined it as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”.

Corruption in the thinking of Obasanjo (2017) is a form of dishonest or unethical conduct by a person or group of persons, entrusted with a position of authority or an activity which involves financial or any other resources, outside his or her own, often with a view to acquiring personal or group benefits. Corruption is also the misuse of a public office or a position of authority and responsibility for private material or social gain at the expense of other people, individual or corporate. It includes bribery which is the use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust; nepotism, which is bestowal of patronage by reason of prescriptive relationship rather than merit and misappropriation, which is appropriating of public resources for private use.

Corruption can be variously grouped into political, financial, ethnic and personal types, although corruption is corruption no matter how leniently or loosely put. It must be stated that ‘political corruption’ is a persistent phenomenon in Nigeria and there is politics everywhere including the Church, especially if politics is seen as concerned with power, status, and influence within an organization, rather than with matters of principle.

Salisu (2000) identified corruption as the misapplication of public resources to private ends. Khan (1996) defined corruption as an act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private-regarding-motive such as wealth, power or status. Corruption is equally seen as pervasion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity. According to him, corruption takes place when at least two parties have interacted to change the structure or processes of society or the behaviour of functionaries in order to produce dishonest, unfaithful or defiled situations.

The above definitions identify corruption with economy and politics except the views of some scholars which emphasized the pervasion of integrity. The distortion of the gospel by preachers is corruption. The abuse of human rights and environmental degradation is corruption as well. Achebe (1988) best described corruption in Nigeria as a phenomenon which has permeated the African society and anyone who can say that corruption in Africa has not become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this continent.





The origin of corruption is for ages. The first incidence of corruption brought to public notice within the entity called Nigeria was reported in 1957 by the British colonial office on the activities of the foster – Sutton Tribunal. This tribunal was set up to inquire into allegations of corruption by the premier of Eastern Nigeria, and other officials of the region (United Nations report, 2016). Some Scholars have traced the emergence of corruption in all strata of Nigeria’s society back to the Colonial Era when Nigerians were bribed with different foreign goods in exchange for local products for slaves.

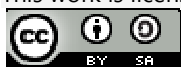
Rotimi et al (2013) observed that outside the bribe offered Nigerians by European Traders (which the Nigerians did not reject. Mine), the Nigeria system from independence has remained corrupt such that corruption is used to check corruption by corrupting the system. The illegitimate taking over of government by the various military regimes via coup d’etat was often justified by pervasive corruption. According to him, the military intended to use corruptly armed measures to check and making the economy worse off; abolition of the constitution by replacing it with decrees, abuse of fundamental human rights among others. Ribadu (2006) supported the above observation, claiming that successive military regimes subdued the rule of law, facilitated the wanton looting of the public treasury, decapitated public institutions and free speech and instituted a secret and opaque culture in the running of government business. Corruption became the dominant guiding principle for running affairs of state. Nigeria is ranked among the most corrupt countries of the world (Transparency International 2005).

In the perspective of Nigeria’s government, corruption is a social menace; a crime committed by man in a privileged public position against his fellow man by distorting or uttering the utilitarian principle of the “greater good for the greater number of persons. In the thinking of government, corruption, economic growth and political stability of the nation are tied with each other. Therefore the eradication of corruption has been a major preoccupation of successive administrations in the entity called Nigeria from 1957 till date. Government has always considered a greater law enforcement capacity and a relatively high cost for involvement in corrupt practices in terms of the penalties, as a deterrent to corruption where it is at a high level.

In Nigeria, successive administrations have attempted to strengthen existing policies and agencies and sometimes creating new ones that could strictly and ruthlessly address the causes of corruption by enforcing due process and the rule of law in public administration. The aim of government has been economic recovery, financial transparency and accountability that would restore an improved environment for public finance, better governance and better performance in Nigeria. Government has established agencies and initiated programmes to curb corruption in Nigeria.

Agencies:

- i) Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) established in 2003 to complement the zero tolerance for corruption crusade of Obasanjo’s administration. The anti-graft body was established by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Establishment Act (2004). The Act mandates the EFCC to combat financial and economic crimes. The





commission is empowered to prevent, investigate, prosecute and penalise economic and financial crimes and is charged with the responsibility of enforcing the provisions of other laws and regulations relating to economic and financial crimes, including; Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Establishment Act (2004), The Money Laundering Act 1995, The Money Laundering (Prohibitions) Act 2004, The Advance Fee Fraud and other Fraud Related Offences Act 1995, the Failed Banks (Recovery of Debts) and Financial Malpractices in Banks Act 1994, The Banks and other Financial Institutions Act 1991; and Miscellaneous Offences Act.

- ii) The Independent Corruption Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC).
- iii) Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB).
- iv) Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI).
- v) Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (BMPIU).
- vi) Nigeria Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) (Rotimi, 2013).

Programmes and Initiatives:

- i) Ethical Re-Orientation Campaign (ERC) of Shagari's Second Republic.
- ii) War Against Indiscipline (WAI) of the Buhari/Idiagbon regime.
- iii) Babangida's Committee on Corruption and other Economic Crimes (CCEC) and War Against Corruption (WAC).
- iv) War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC) of the Gen. Sani Abacha's regime.
- v) Whistle blowing of Buhari/Osinbajo Administration,

Other efforts include; setting up of probe panels, commission of enquiry and tribunal to try corrupt individuals (Rotimi, 2013). All these efforts put in place by successive administrations to eradicate corruption in Nigeria have remained unsuccessful. Corruption keeps recurring in every academic and formal discussion in Nigeria because of the danger it poses to economic recovery and national security and development.

Nature and Types of Corruption in Nigeria

- I. Corruption in Nigeria is endemic across systems and institutions; it involves the attitude, values and actors of individuals, who experience corruption in an individualistic way due to family values.
- II. Individuals make the choice of whether or not to corrupt or be corrupted, to behave ethically or unethically, even though they may operate within institutions.
- III. Despite high level of religiosity, the country is engulfed in entrenched corruption. Both Christians and non Christians are corrupt because political and economic corruption is conceived a quick means of having a fair share of national cake accruable from oil.
- IV. It is difficult to conclude that any particular religious organization is considerably more corrupt than the other. This is because in Nigeria both people standing trials on cases of





alleged corruption and those convicted by law hide themselves under the cover of religion, ethnocentrism and commensalism that have become a religion itself.

- V. In Nigeria most people engage in religion simply on a ritualistic level and may not be aware of what their sacred text says about ethics and corruption.
- VI. Perpetrators of corruption in Nigeria especially the top political office holders and civil servants who are adherents of a church do not fear any punishment or consequences because the legislation free them from scrutiny and they are covered with political immunity. The scripture which instruct that God's prophets and His anointed should not be touched or be harmed by any man has freed religious leaders, particularly some corrupt Christian leaders who are covered with religious immunity.

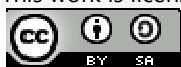
Corruption in Nigeria is endemic. There are political, economic, moral and religious corruptions. Both moral and religious corruption is the focus of this study. Although moral and religious corruption cannot be treated without economic and political corruption in a country like Nigeria where the GDP is low and political fraud is high. Moral and religious corruption manifests itself in economic and political corruption and vice versa.

The Church and Corruption

What relates the Church and society is ethics, but the Church is different from society in nature and function. Church perspectives and methods used in fighting corruption are different from that of the secular government.

The Church in Greek means *ekklésía*, referring to a meeting of a people called out (Greek *ekkaleo*) and summoned together. A company of redeemed believers called out of the world and into the kingdom of God (**2 Cor. 6:16-18**). It is a pilgrimage; people no longer belonging to this world, whose functions are (1) to stand as a community in a living, personal relationship with God (**1 Peter 2:5**); (2) to stand as an army involved in spiritual conflicts, fighting by the sword and power of the spirit (**Eph. 6:17**) in a spiritual struggle against Satan and sin.

The Church is like a warrior wielding the living word of God, delivering people from the dominion of Satan and conquering every power of darkness (**Act 26:18; Eph. 6:10-18; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:15,21**); (3) The Church stands as the pillar and ground of the truth, supporting the truth that God has revealed; upholding the truth and keep it safe, defending it against distorters and false teachers; (4) through its powerful witness, sinners will be saved, born again, baptized in water, and added to the Church; they will partake of the Lord's supper and wait for Christ's return (**Acts 5:14; 11:24; 1 Cor. 12:13**); (5) The Church stands in humility, awe, and fear before the presence of a holy God. The members will be concerned for the purity of the Church, disciplining sinning members and teachers not loyal to the biblical faith (**Act 20:28; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Mat. 18:15**); (6) Believers will separate themselves from the prevailing world view and spirit of their surrounding culture (**Act 2:40; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 1:4; 1 John 2:15-16**).





The Church is the body of Christ. (*1 Cor. 6:15-16; 10:16-17*). No true Church exists apart from vital union of the members with Christ, the head of the body (*Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22; 4:15*). The Church is both invisible and visible. The Church invisible is the body of true believers united by their living faith in Christ; while the visible Church consists of local congregations containing faithful over comers as well as those professed Christians who are false, fallen, spiritually dead and lukewarm (Donald and Stamps, 1992). The Church in Nigeria has been performing its functions, disciplining erring members with the view to checking erring members of the society.

Church Perspectives of Corruption

The Church traces the origin of corruption in human society to the depravity of man from the time of Adam and Eve. Satan is the brain behind corruption, being the one that deceived Eve that what God had said to Adam was not true. God had told Adam not to eat of every tree of the garden, particularly the fruit of the tree of life which was in the midst of the garden; neither should he touch it, lest they die (*Gen. 3:1-6*). Satan tempted and deceived the woman (Eve) and she fell because of lust of the flesh. In the episode Satan used serpent to corrupt Eve who later corrupted Adam from the original image of God who has created them. From then, human who is bound to God by faith in His word and absolute truth became doubtful and unbelieving to God's instructions.

In Jesus times Satan continued its attack on God through the use of God's creation when it entered the chief priests to bribe Judas Iscariot one of Jesus' disciples to betray him for thirty pieces of silver (*Matt. 26:14-16*). The Church's standpoint is that corruption is part of human race; something allowed or permitted by God to happen, even though he does not specifically desire it in human society. The world through this age will remain an enemy to God and his people (*John 15:19; Rom. 12:1-2; James 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17*). The rule of God by direct judgment will occur only at the end of this age (*Rev. 19:11-21*): more so that the future manifestation of God's glory, power and kingdom will occur when Jesus returns to judge the world (*Matt. 24:30; Luke 21:27; Rev. 20:1-15*). In addition, that the ultimate fulfillment of the kingdom shall come when Christ finally triumphs over all evil and delivers up the kingdom to God (*1 Cor. 15:24-28*).

The old man, the unregenerate is corrupt, what corrupts him is the deceitful lust of the world (*Eph. 4:22*). A corrupt person is one whose mind is corrupted and is destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness (*1 Tim. 6:5*). A corrupt person is described as an oppressor (*James 5:1*). In (*1 Cor. 15:42, 52; 2 Pet. 2:12*); we understand that corruption is part of human nature, that man is born corrupt and he dies corrupt and shall be changed from being corruptible to being incorruptible when Christ returns. This is because man shall not remain corrupt and inherit the kingdom of God. He must be changed from corrupt into incorrupt by Christ. The change from being corrupt to being incorrupt is the very essence of the resurrection of the death at the appearance of Christ on earth.

The Church regards distorted gospel that is capable of leading people into grave danger of being deceived and their minds led astray from wholehearted devotion to Christ as corruption (*2 Cor.*





11:3-4). People who live their lives as if there is no God and the substances they bring for sacrifices, offering and tithes to God are as well considered corrupt. In Church's view, corruption goes with a sense of morality, ethics and judgment. Corruption is used to identify things that do not belong to God from the things that belong to God.

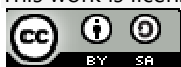
How Corruption came to Nigerian Church

The corruption that has ravaged the society has been with the Church and when it came the church did not expose and clean it. The Church wrapped it with a foil of superficial righteousness, bogus ambitions, quest for materialism, unhealthy competitions, among members, leaders and even with multi-national co-operations in terms of which church denomination own the biggest buildings and the largest population. The competition is even worse among church leaders who want their members to be appointed or elected into the highest position in government and who have the highest number of cars, aeroplane, and estate in the best cities of the world (Premium Times 2017). Wealthy pastors in Nigeria mostly in the Pentecostal churches plunder their followers and spend their spoils on self-indulgent existence because government regards churches as charitable organization and exempts them from paying taxes. (Sahara reporter, 2016). The behaviour of some church leaders in the country in recent times breeds corruption.

The Church's patience, accommodation and tolerance with corrupt persons within and outside the Church, while desiring to see them repent and return to God has made the Church look like a hide out for corrupt persons. Also in Churches today there are those who present themselves as ministers of righteousness whose teaching contradicts the word of God. Such teachers may state that the biblical revelations is true but at the same time allege that they possess extra biblical revelations or knowledge equal in authority to scriptures valid for the Church as a whole.

These kinds of teacher and preacher are found among the pentecostal, catholic and protestant churches. The catholic and protestant clergy are better trained in Christian doctrines and homiletics than the Pentecostals before ordination as priest. Many of the Pentecostal priests are self ordained, claiming the call of God into ministry because they are born again and baptised in the Holy Spirit. Such teachers with their corrupted Gospel, that Apostle Paul identified as "Another Gospel" (**2 Cor. 11:3-4**) are capable of leading members into great danger of being deceived and their minds led astray from the Gospel of Christ.

The result of this corruption in the Church is that the original word of God, the standard revealed by Christ and apostles in the New Testament are being replaced. A corrupt gospel based on the supposed "new revelation" is put on same level of authority as the original apostolic biblical revelation in Christ. The scripture becomes less important and Christ takes second place to founders of Church movement in society. The false teachers who replace the original gospel with another gospel also claim to have deeper and exclusive understanding of the so-called "hidden revelations" in scriptures (Stamps, 1992).





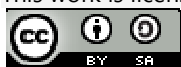
The presence of another Gospel in the Church in Nigeria reveals the corruption that is within it and the Church has not been able to eradicate this internal corruption, yet speaking against corrupt practices perpetuated by public officials in Nigeria. The divide within Christianity along the lines of contemplative and active asceticism has contributed to the Church's ineffectiveness in fighting corruption within and outside it.

The contemplative ascetics are of the view that corruption is part and parcel of a sinful world, where everyone is confronted with the decision whether to submit to God's rule or not (*Matt. 3:1-2; Mk 1:14-1*). The world through this age will remain an enemy to God and his people (*John 15:19; Rm. 12:1-2; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17*). The rule of God by direct judgment will occur only at the end of this age (*Rev. 19:11-21*). More so that the future manifestation of God's glory power and kingdom will occur when Jesus returns to judge the world (*Matt. 24:30; Lk. 21:27; Rev. 20:1-15*). And in addition, that the ultimate fulfillment of the kingdom comes when Christ finally triumphs over all evil and opposition and deliver up the kingdom to God (*1 Cor. 15:24-28*).

Based on this biblical standpoints, contemplative ascetics are not fighters for their God. They do not seek a consciousness of divine grace through ever-new victories over ever-new temptations in their constant trouble with the world and men as they are. They do not grapple with the world, they reject it. In order to do so, they seek to empty themselves of every mundane appearance and to attain a state of "repose" in the divine. Achieving the contemplative stage requires negative defense against natural and social disturbances in order to concentrate on the truth (Bendix, 1977). This kind of contemplative ascetic position has made some Christians passive in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The catholic and protestant Churches hold the contemplative ascetic view of the world.

Furthermore, within the Church there exists, another group called the active ascetics Christians who are considered by the contemplative ascetic as preaching another Gospel. Active ascetic seek to conquer rather than withdraw from imperfection of the world. Proponents of active asceticism within the Church view corruption as a phenomenon that can be eradicated from human society though not with strict and ruthless approaches adopted by government. The Pentecostal churches hold the active ascetic view of the world.

Saale (2016) aligns preachers who hold the principles of active asceticism in Nigeria's Churches with humanist's philosophies of secular humanism. Humanists aim at replacing theology with unadulterated morality by disentangling moral ideas from religious doctrines, making it an independent force in personal life and social relations (Campbell, 1971). The greatest threats to Bible based Christianity seems not to have come from humanists with non-religious life glance but advocates of a religion of humanity of Auguste Comte and Henry Edger's American version of the Church of humanity within Christianity. These Christian leaders hold the active ascetic ideology that seeks to conquer rather than withdraw from the imperfection of the world. To them the world is God's creation and the only arena in which God-fearing men might reach a state of





grace and become certain of salvation. These Christian leaders within Christianity seek to establish a religion that is with a dynamic force to meet the needs of the day.

Humanists within Christianity disguise themselves as apostles of Christ and ministers of righteousness, (*2 Cor.11:15*). Thus, they imitate real ministers of Christ, putting into their messages every available form of godliness (*2 Tim. 2:3*), but their messages deviate from the New Testament apostolic doctrine (*1 John 4:1*).

The scenario in Nigeria Church presents a situation where corrupt person can hide either in Churches that hold the active ascetic principles. For example, one EvastusAkingbola who allegedly siphoned 200billion naira from the bank and ran from prosecution according to the former CBN governor and current Emir of Kano was shielded by a church. Pastors who own private jets bought them with church fund and are moving about in their garments of righteousness in the Pentecostal churches (Sahara reporter, 2016).

Church Method of Fighting Corruption

Corruption can be fought in many ways. The church fights corruption by attempting to re-inject religion, morality and ethics into a society that is entrenched with false value system, attitudes and beliefs. Ideally, church roles in fighting corruption include:

- I. Using the pulpit to teach and preach righteousness and honest living.
- II. The Church embraces a more inclusive definition of evangelism that is not only limited to winning soul to increase the crowd in the Church but to embrace discipleship which is the clearing of the soul and heart towards righteous living (Obasanjo, 2017).
- III. The Church takes her stands to the high moral ground and speaks against corrupt leadership and poor governance.
- IV. The Church embarks on moral re-armament for the nation.
- V. The message of prosperity is preached with caution and moderation bearing in mind the mission of Christ (*Luke 4: 18-19*).
- VI. Church authority is very careful in believing and celebrating every testimony of miraculous blessing in order not to be hoodwinked into celebrating corruption.
- VII. The Church provides a language of ethics and an actual list of rules to live by for the members. In Nigeria, many public servants who are adherents of a church derive their ethical frame work from their faith. Hence the Church provides religious values and organisations used in fighting corruption.
- VIII. Christian leaders are useful in the fight against corruption because they maintain fairness and honesty which form the basis of their faith. The faithful adherents refrain from corruption because of the inherent theft, dishonest, illegality and mistreatment of others.
- IX. The Church is a social environment where citizens are made to be morally and ethically conscious of the negative impacts of their value based decision to accept bribe or to be involved in any form of corruption. The gospel of Jesus Christ is





preached to create a loving and God fearing mind in adherents who care about those around them and would not like to corrupt them (Obasanjo, 2017).

In the fight against corruption Christians of both active and contemplative asceticism seem to agree on the Church's method of fighting corruption, engaging themselves in spiritual warfare while exercising patience with corrupt persons, desiring to see them return to God. But the active ascetic Christians differ from the contemplative ascetic Christians in their approach in fighting corruption. While the contemplative Christians hate corruption as they hate sin and preach against it; the active ascetic Christians in the guise of exercising patience and tolerance accommodate corrupt persons, preach their prosperity Gospel which distorts the original gospel of Christ and the Apostles; leading people into corrupt practices. They believe that by allowing the corrupt persons in Church they will hear the Gospel they preach, repent and return to God, a desire that is not yet realizable in Nigeria.

The Church does not fight corruption with canal weapons like secular authority, instead it engages members in a spiritual warfare while exercising patience with corrupt persons, desiring to see them return to God. The offender or corrupt person is approached and reprovved in private. If he listens, he is forgiven (*Matt. 18:15*). If he refuses to respond to the advice of the brethren and the authority of the local Church he is to be considered as one outside the Church because he severed from Christ and fallen from grace. From then the corrupt person has no right to Church membership and must be removed from the fellowship of the Church. This method adopted by the Church in fighting corruption is quite different from methods used by secular authorities.

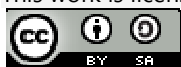
Role of the Church in the Fight against Corruption in Nigeria

The Church in Nigeria has been performing its functions, disciplining erring members with the view to checking erring members of society. The important role played by the Church in the development of Nigeria is attested to by the observation of Olusegun Obasanjo (2017)

“... we are now at another important historic juncture requiring the Church to play a leading role. This is a period of moral and ethical rebirth. That role must be played in praying, preaching and teaching”.

In Nigeria the catholic bishops at its conference told president Muhammadu Buhari, that his anti-corruption fight has failed. According to the bishops, Buhari assumed office in 2016 on enormous goodwill since many saw him as a person of integrity who would be able to bring sanity into a system that was nearly crippled by endemic corruption (Guardian newspaper, 2018. Feb. 8)

The catholic bishops again warned Nigerian politicians against corruption ahead of 2019 election, requesting them to repent from corrupt and evil deals so that Nigeria would experience a change (Guardian newspaper 2018. Feb. 9). In similar vein, Felix Omobude, National President of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) warned politicians clamouring for positions of





authority because of corruption. In his prophetic statement said many of the politicians shall be disappointed. (Guardian newspaper, 2017. Dec 31).

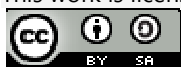
More so the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) has taken a swipe at President Muhamadu Buhari's administration, condemning his management of all allegations of corruption levelled against some serving officials, demanding that such allegations should not be swept under the carpet because it has become crystal clear that not only members of the opposition party are corrupt. According to the Lagos state chairman of (PFN), Bishop Sola Ore, Mr. Buhari since assumption of office as president has performed below the expectations of the populace and has failed to restore normalcy to the many crises afflicting the country. Bishop Ore on behalf of (PFN) called on the president to make the anti-corruption war objective and fair to all. (Guardian newspaper, 2017. Jan. 31).

Furthermore, Marquette (2010) said that in Nigeria a pastor was suspended from a church near Abujah for embezzling millions of naira belonging to the church. He cited other examples of church leaders urging their adherents to avoid corrupt activities. In 2002, when Pope John Paul II, spoke out against corruption and called on all catholics to refrain from engaging in corrupt practices. And when, the World Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe in December, 1998 made clear statements condemning corruption. According to to them, the organization called on all of its member churches to urge governments to take legislative actions against all forms of corruption.

These important roles played by the church in the fight against corruption was equally attested to by the Kogi state Governor, Yahaya Bello in an apology made to the catholic bishops for criticizing them over their comments about the performance of President Buhari in the fight against corruption. "Irecognise the enormous contributions of the catholic church to entrenching a social order which is devoid of corruption and oppression in the country..." (Guardian newspaper, 2018. Feb. 12). From the foregoing the role of the Church in the war against corruption in Nigeria is enormous but in the view of this study it is passive and inadequate.

Why Church Role is Perceive and Inadequate

The scenario in Nigeria Church presents a situation where corrupt person can hide either in Churches that hold the active ascetic principles or those upholding the contemplative ascetic principles. In the fight against corruption Christians of both active and contemplative asceticism seem to agree on the Church method of fighting corruption,engaging themselves in spiritual warfare while exercising patience with corrupt persons, desiring to see them return to God. But the active ascetic Christians differ from the contemplative ascetic Christians in their approach of fighting corruption. While the contemplative Christians hate corruption as they hate sin and preach against it; the active ascetic Christians in the guise of exercising patience, tolerance and accommodating corrupt persons, preach their prosperity Gospel which distort the original gospel of Christ and the Apostles; leading people into corrupt practices. These believe that by allowing the corrupt persons in Church they will hear the Gospel they preach, repent and return to God, a desire that is not yet realizable in Nigeria.





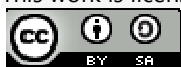
The divide within Christianity has made the role of The Church in fighting corruption in Nigeria inadequate. While the government of Nigeria expects the Church to hand over to it a list of corrupt persons who are removed from fellowship, the Church has continued to provide a hide out for corrupt persons who refuse to heed to the advice of brethren and local Church Authorities that frowned at their activities. These corrupt persons crisscross from one church denomination to another ready to accommodate them. The Church faced with these challenges of meeting public expectations and demands for a fall in the rate of corruption in the country, sometimes speak against corrupt practices perpetuated within public domain without first attempting to eradicate corruption in the church before adopting a uniform approach in the fight against corruption.

Church role in the fight against corruption in Nigeria has remained passive and inadequate as church leaders with their members merely pray and fast to God about the menace of corruption; made pronouncements either praising or condemning secular leaders and their anti-corruption programmes without being pro-active enough. They have sometimes compiled and published their recommendations on ways of fighting corruption to civil authorities but have not in practical terms implemented their recommendations within the Church. No public condemnation is made of church members who had cases of corruption on their necks and are being decorated with the garment of righteousness. After all, many civil servants and politicians who perpetuate corruption in the country belong to the Church.

Whenever corruption is discovered and exposed within the Church it always comes from public observers and not members or leadership of the church. For example, a Christian film from the south entitled “Outrage over actor Rahama” showing middle-aged women in unholy affairs and students seducing teachers was published by non-Christians (Guardian newspaper, 2016. Oct. 19).

In Nigeria, Christians who dare to expose fraudulent behaviours of adherents of their faith are often fired by leaders of Christian Association. For example the appeals of Vice President Osinbajo to the Church to be actively engaged in the government anti-corruption war was condemned by Rev. Fr. Francis AnekweOborji. According to Anekwe, the idea to ask citizens to be part of government effort to sanitize its financial sector through anti-corruption graft and promotion of unity of the nation is good. However, it is all together a different thing when those in the corridors of power want to compel the Church and its leaders to assume state functions as ecclesial mission in the country. He said Christian leaders owe their obligations to preach and teach, not to the state government but to God. The Church cannot be made a promoter of government agenda and policies such as the most tortured fight against corruption. (Premium times, 2017. Nov. 5).

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo’s appeals to the Church to join in the fight against corruption has often been criticized by some church leaders. The separation of ecclesial missions from state functions in the country has made church role in the fight against corruption passive and inadequate. Church passivity and inadequacies in the anti-corruption war is attributed to its





mere pronouncement either praising or condemning government policies and actions on corruption without taking radical actions against corruption among its member. The Church has failed to take radical action because the leaders who have the authority to do so are the ones entrenching themselves in behaviours which breed corruption.

The apostle Paul spoke of how ...a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump...” (1corinthians 5:6). He compared leaven with the process by which sin and wickedness slowly spread in a Christian community until many are corrupted by it. Corruption in Nigeria has begun with leaders whose corrupt life styles and value system have spread among Christian and non-Christian communities.

In Nigeria high expectations and high demands for Church involvement in the fight against corruption come from advocates of democracy, an ideology of secular humanism, while those of the contemplative ascetics tradition believe in Church fighting corruption with spiritual weapons, waiting for the final fulfilment of judgment of corrupt practices when Jesus returns.

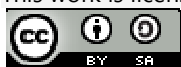
Conclusion

The paper concludes that the role of the Church in the fight against corruption in Nigeria has remained inadequate because it has not been able to minimise incidences of corrupt Gospel introduced into its body by some preachers who hold the principles of active asceticism. The Church speaking against corrupt practices perpetuated by public officials in Nigeria makes it look hypocritical. It is part of the Church social responsibilities to fight corruption because the Church is in the society and society is in the Church. Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians Church, *1Cor.5:12-13* attests to this truth. “For what have I to do with judging those outsiders? Is it not those inside the Church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside, drive out the wicked person from among you”.

The safety of the Church from twisted and corrupt gospel would be the safety of Nigeria from corruption. True religions remain the ethical and moral foundation for human society. What will happen to the spiritual and moral foundations of any society if the Church is corrupt? Secular authorities will obviously be helpless in their fights against social evils.

Jesus who is the founder of the Church remains the Church’s good example in the fight against social evils in all ages. He demonstrated the Church’s social responsibilities in many instances in scripture. For example, he chased out money changers from the temple in Jerusalem while attempting a clean-up of social evil practiced in his days. What Jesus condemns is the Church judging in an unjust manner, that is, Church forming the habit of criticizing others while ignoring its own fault.

Church’s failure to discipline corrupt members will mean to neglect God’s instruction and the consequence will be spiritual compromise and ultimate destruction of the Church. This is because Church discipline is meant to protect God’s reputation (*Matt. 6:9; Rom. 2:23-24*). It guards the moral purity and doctrinal integrity of the Church (*1 Cor. 5:6, 7; 2 John 7:11*). Church discipline is an attempt to save the soul of the wayward, corrupt member and restore him





to full Christ likeness (*1 Cor. 5:5; James 5:19-20*). The disappearance of Church discipline from Nigeria's Churches, dominated by preachers who hold the principles of active asceticism is the cause of high rate of corruption in the country's social system.

The Church's active engagement in the fight against corruption in human society should be its persistent prayer for both spiritual and moral revival that should begin in the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit, impacting on society. Any distortion of the original gospel of Christ and the Apostles that will quench the power of the Holy Spirit renders the Church helpless and ineffective while performing its latent functions.

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