Corruption In Africa And Its Challenges For The Enterprise Of Christian Theology

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Abstract

Corruption is the greatest tragedy of Africa. Its machinery has spread through this burgeoning continent. It is a hydra headed social evil that has its tentacles well spread and its nest well laid, with its flame burning wild and wild. Its alarming growth can be likened to a mad horse galloping down the slope. The issue of corruption keeps reoccurring in every academic and informal discussion in Africa! This piece is a contribution to the academic discourse on corruption in Africa. However, while not suggesting any intention to trek all the allies of corrupt practices in Africa, it adopts a new method to tackle the problem, by focusing on its implications for the enterprise of Christian theology.

INTRODUCTION

A cursory analysis of the evolution of human history reveals that four principal revolutions have occurred. The Neolithic Revolution¹, which took place during the later part of the Stone Age, was the substratum of all revolutions. This revolution had a force that moved all the corners of the world, including Africa to share in its transforming force. Proceeding was the Industrial Revolutionⁱⁱ of the 17th and 18th centuries which brought about an attendant transformation of Western cities into the likeness of the proverbial eschatological Jerusalem. However, during this period the European soul propelled by a frenzied greed entangled Africa with the clutches and pangs of the slave tradeⁱⁱⁱ. This was enough preoccupation to deny Africa participation. Emerging at the 19th C was the Agrarian Revolution^{iv}; again Africa was denied participation, because she was struggling with the colonial pirates in power. The 21st century is here again witnessing a revolution, the Information Technology Revolution, which is insidiously making the world a global village and turning us into cosmopolitans on a global conference table^v. Again Africa is here denied a gainful participation, not by any external force, but by the exploitation and orchestrated rape of the continent by the heads of government, their henchmen and *citizens*^{vi}. Their activities can be summed up in one word: Corruption; and it has its hand on every pie of the continent's life, from the smallest sociological unit to the public sector.

Corruption is the greatest tragedy of Africa. Its machinery has spread through this burgeoning continent. It is a hydra headed social evil that has its tentacles well spread and its nest well laid, with its flame burning wild and wild. Its alarming growth can be likened to a mad horse galloping down the slope. The issue of corruption keeps reoccurring in every academic and informal discussion in Africa, and the issue will hardly go away! This piece is a contribution to the academic discourse on corruption in Africa; however, while not

suggesting any intention to trek all the allies of corrupt practices in Africa, it adopts a new method to tackle the problem of corruption in Africa, by focusing on its implications for the enterprise of Christian theology.

A GLANCE AT CORRUPTION IN AFRICA

If there is any social malaise whose notoriety hardly can be paralleled, and which bears an ignoble identity with the geographical construction otherwise known as Africa, then one rarely needs a deep search to discover that which is our point of departure- corruption. Corruption enjoys an unravelled fame whose knowledge, one neither requires the dexterity of a herald nor an excruciating probe of the intellect to decipher; its ubiquity is phenomenal in all respects. It lies beneath the façade of social cum political problems confronting the continent. It is a malaise that wears the toga of an enigma that defies a definite description, yet intimate in all fronts^{vii}. The damages it has done to the continent are astronomical. Even the mad people on the street recognize the havoc caused by corruption - the funds allocated for their welfare disappear into the thin air. Hence, it is believed by many in the society that corruption is the bane of Africa^{viii}.

Corruption has become so institutionalized that many now accept it as the African way of doing things. People now speak of the 'African factor' when they speak of corruption^{ix}. Those associated with criminal records are embraced by the society, while merit, honesty and integrity are hardly recognized. In the area of election in Africa, it is common site to see purchase of votes by the political class with money, promises of office or special favours, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election. Votes are bought, people are killed or maimed in the name of election, losers end up as the winners in elections, and votes turn up in areas where votes were not cast. The politicians and political decision-makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish and implement the laws on behalf of the people of Africa, are themselves corrupt.

Corruption has become a business in vogue in Africa that continues to destroy the political and economic life of the continent. It is therefore, not surprising that of the 25 countries perceived as most corrupt by The 2006 Transparency International Corruptions Index, 15 are African States- including Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Kenya, and Nigeria. Confounding the stereotype is Botswana which comes out as the 37th least corrupt state in the world ahead of Italy, Cyprus and Hungary^x.

Corruption in Africa has led to the collection of debt by many African countries that now stare their citizens to pay back, and most of these debts were collected for contracts that were never completed or done at all. Today Africa spends four times more on debt servicing than it does on health care. In Zambia, as of 2006, every citizen owed the country's creditors some \$570, more than three times the average annual salary. Kenya pays a quarter of the value of its annual exports in debt servicing, more than \$4 for every \$1 received in grants. To earn hard currency to pay for its debts, Kenya's deforestation has increased with an annual loss of 3,000 hectares of forest. Following the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), to help pay debts, school fees have been introduced leading to the fall in enrolment into primary and secondary schools. In countries like Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, primary school attendance is under 30%. Of 46 African countries, 8 have debt less than \$200 per capita, 22 have each a debt of between \$200 and \$500 per person. More heavily indebted are 10 countries that owe between \$500 and \$1,000 for each citizen, while Cote d'Ivore, Angola, Tunisia and Mauritania owe between \$1,000 and \$1,500 per person. Congo

has an estimate of \$2,000 per person, and Gabon suffers from an estimated \$3,500 per person^{xi}.

Africa is a continent that has lost two vital and veritable tools of good governance: stability and credibility. She is trapped in a tangle web of callous leaders who are champions of administrative tactical indiscipline, dissipations and plundering. They wear corruption and matchless mischief like a signet ring to demonstrate to the rest of the world that they are quite shameless in their brash polity and harsh principles that put everything on the continent in dare strata with the attendant recipe for disaster^{xii}. Unlike their Asian counterparts, African politicians prefer to take their loot to Europe or the United States, far from prying eyes.

As a consequence of corruption in Africa, nowhere is a continent more miserable like in Africa. Africa has become the basket case of the planet, 'the third world of the third world', a vast continent in free fall". Africa has posed a fresh problem for the external world because their interest in it has now become merely charitable- a matter of humanitarianism, a moral test for the West. Africa now suffers a shocking humiliation as a continent. She faces international ostracism. Both the guilty and the innocent are paying for it.

In terms of education, corruption has made Africa glide precariously into the state of a primitive age when it was a taboo to go to school. Endless strikes by teachers whose salaries are not paid for many months and involvement in sinister activities by students who are subjected to very harsh neglect have turned most institutions of learning into dens of potential criminals. Most certificates issued by learning institutions in Nigeria provoke doubt wherever they are presented. Most of our graduates who go abroad to further their education are subjected to another examination to prove that they are truly graduates.

There is a high rate of unemployment. The faces of a greater percentage of Africans register destitution, frustration and despair. Politically, the turmoil, the repression and the general insecurity that has pervaded Africa has forced thousands of Africans young and old to flout all international border laws to get out of the continent. Their patterns of escape from Africa strongly suggest that they prefer to die than return to Africa. Some enter ice-fish containers, preferring to die suffocated by the smell and cold, some pass through the deserts of North Africa, preferring to face wild beasts than return home, young girls in huge numbers are moved across the sea to Europe rather than face economic backwardness caused by corruption^{xiii}. A visit to the American Embassy reveals a huge number of Africans struggling to leave the continent as though they were given an ultimatum. Consequently, the image of most African countries has suddenly slumped into infamy^{xiv}. It is in this regard that Pope John Paul II compares the continent of Africa to the unfortunate wayfarer who fell into the hands of brigands along Jerusalem-Jericho road: "Africa", he says, "is a continent where countless human beings, men and women, children and young people, are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandoned"^{XV}.

As Nigerians, let corruption be driven home. A quick glance at the Nigerian history reveals that it is one of corruption. This is 50years after independence (1960) and there is nothing substantial to show for it as more than half of Nigerians are still living in poverty. A country like Malaysia got her independence in 1957, but amazingly she was aired by the African Independent Television as a country that took palm kernel from Nigeria and put them into profitable use. By the time they took the Palm kernel from Nigeria, 50% of her citizens were living below the poverty line, but today only 6% of her population are poor. The country was transformed with the proceeds from palm oil and kernel, but here in Nigeria there are crude oil, palm kernel, coal, hide and skin, cocoa etc, and not much has come out of them.

THE EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION ON AFRICA

The effects of corruption on Africa's socio-political and economic development are myriad. They range from positive to negative consequences. On a positive note, scandals associated with corruption sometimes have the effect of strengthening a value system of a society as a whole. Corruption can also humanize government and make it less awesome. These are no doubt true of the experiences of people in Nigeria. The views expressed above notwithstanding, in this segment of the article, the researcher is primarily concerned with the negative consequences of corruption on Africa.

- Corruption affects economic growth as it, among other things, reduces government spending on education^{xvi}.
- Poverty and income inequalities are tied to corruption^{xvii}.
- Some foreign donors do not give aid to corrupt nations. For instance, the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) has withdrawn development support from some nations that are notoriously corrupt. And the *World Bank* has introduced tougher anti-corruption standards into its lending policies to corrupt countries. Similarly, other organizations such as the *Council of Europe* and the *Organization of American States* are taking tough measures against international corruption.
- Corruption is politically destabilizing, as it leads to social revolution and military takeover of governments.
- Corruption causes a reduction in quality of goods and services available to the public, as some companies could cut corners to reduce quality margins and increase profit margins^{xviii}.
- Corruption scares away investors from Africa^{xix}.
- Corruption can tarnish the image of a country.
- Corruption is one of the reasons for the 'brain drain' phenomenon in Africa.
- Corruption leads to slow movement of files that get through the desk of officers. It also leads to missing files that resurface immediately the desk officer is *settled*, unnecessary bureaucracy and delays until bribes are given.

THE CHALLENGES OF CORRUPTION IN AFRICA FOR CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Africa has come of age and she can no longer afford to be led by the nose, by corrupt, inept, misguided and self serving rulers. The time has come for African theologians to rally themselves into a formidable theological solidarity to conscientize the people and thus create a movement of liberation, that will in the long run, help to pull down or at least weaken the chains of the structures of corruption that oppress Africans^{xx}. This process of liberation must be guided by the Holy Spirit who in the contention of Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, was sent into the world to further complete the work of integral redemption and liberation^{xxi}. There must also be allowed a free interplay of fundamental sources of theology: comprising the Scriptures, through the adoption of the desired hermeneutics, the Magisterium and Tradition of the *Ecclesia*. Theology must also seek a fortification in the renowned values of critical thinking^{xxii}, creative thinking^{xxiii}, caring thinking^{xxviii}. That is, if the challenges of corruption to Christian theology is to be faced.

The present situation of corruption in Africa challenges Christian Theology to the knowledge that it is neither a metaphysical or disinterested intellectual enterprise. Christian theology must see itself as a "social science" for the cause of a continuing transformation of reality,

for the sake of the continuing humanization of people. Christian theology is a discourse about God who is a loving and saving Father. It is a discourse always to be animated by action. It is about life and living according to the will of Christ who became man in order to transform the world and ensure quality life for all (John 10:10). No theology is therefore worth the name if it can afford to ignore the plethora of the contemporary problems that assail the modern man anywhere in the world^{xxix}. This whole idea resonates in the contention of Juan Luis Segundo, "Signs of the time must therefore form the human *locus or locale* where the word of God is heard"^{xxxx} and in John Mary Walliggo's, "The Most powerful source of African theology is the cry of its citizens"^{xxxi}.

John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa issued this challenge to African Christians, which of course has more implications for African Christian Theologians and theology "to live the social implications of the Gospel in such a way that their witness would become a prophetic challenge to whatever hinders the true good of men and women of Africa and of any other continent"^{xxxii}. This emphasizes the need to apply the practical implications of the Gospel to the concrete life of the people. In proclaiming Christ to the people of Africa, theologians must put into consideration that Africa is the most corrupt zone on the globe. This view is further furthered in an interrogative style by the Fathers of the African Synod when they asked, "in a continent full of bad news, how is the Christian message Good News for our people? In the midst of an all-pervading despair, where lie the hope and optimism which the Gospel brings? Evangelization stands for many of those essential values which our continent very much lacks: hope, peace, joy, harmony, love and unity"^{xxxiii}. Christian theology therefore has the challenge of transforming the Gospel into a contextual and objective reality. Any theological engagement in Africa that winks at the dehumanizing conditions of Africa's socio-economic reality constitutes what John Calvin calls a "nefarious perfidy" because this not only betrays the Gospel itself, but also the freedom of God's own people^{xxxiv}. This is reiterated by John Paul II in the Encyclical Letter, Centesimus Annus, when he noted that "As far as the Church is concerned, the social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation for action"****.

In the contention of John Odey, one of the basic challenges of corruption to Christian theology in Africa is to be prophetic in its approach. This whole idea resounds in the words of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta to the Catholic Archbishops of Eastern Africa, in 1976, who holds that "The Church is the conscience of the society, and today a society needs a conscience. Do not be afraid to speak. If we go wrong and you keep quiet, one day you will answer for our mistakes"^{xxxvi}. Sometimes, just like in the experiences of the prophets, such a fashion of doing theology may mean stepping on some big toes and subsequent persecution as has happened in many parts of the globe. However, this is the price theology must pay for the liberation of Africa from the clutches and pangs of corruption. The guiding principle must always be, "We will obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Theologians, having examined, the real situation of corruption in Africa, must go back to the scriptures and ask: what has the word of God to say about this? This is a second stage in the theological construct- a specific stage in which discourse is formally theological. It is a question at this point of seeing the victims of corruption in the light of faith. What does this mean? The expression does not denote something vague or general. The theologian goes to

the stream of the scriptures, bearing the weight of the problems, sorrows and hopes of the victims of corruption seeking light and inspiration from the divine word. This hermeneutics is done in fidelity- that is, in openness to God's ever new and surprising revelation- to the foundational message that can save or condemn. Paul VI in the encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, said that there is always a 'hermeneutic circle' or a 'mutual appeal' between the experiences of people and the word of God^{xxxvii}. This process of hermeneutics must favour application rather than explanation; must read the scriptures as a book of life and not as strange stories; without being reductionist, it must stress the social context of the message. In this way, we discover and activate the transforming energy of biblical text, passing from the word of God to a specific action.

Theology in the opinion of John Waliggo should be able to ask the question, "who is Christ to the people of Africa?"^{xxxviii} This should prompt another question which in the contention of Monica Hellwig is "what difference does Jesus make?"^{xxxix} This Christological question assumes great importance in the face of human suffering in Africa, caused by corruption. This can evoke further questions that elucidate the already asked: What does faith in Jesus bring to the life of the suffering African? What does following Christ mean within this situation? In this regard, many African theologians have constructed a Christology around Christ's central message: proclamation of God's kingdom of justice and righteousness, of peace and unity, of human dignity and universal brotherhood.

Some theologians speak of the image of Christ as one who rewards his faithful in the future. These images though true of Christ may be irrelevant and passive to the present conditions of the African, and this makes many Africans to turn to Christ only as a last resort. In their daily sufferings many revert to African Traditional Religion for solace. African theologians need to begin to construct an image of Christ, who is the suffering servant and still suffers silently with all his children; the image of Christ who is a consoler, comforter, and hope to those who trust in Him; a mysterious God who cannot be manipulated; a mysterious Christ who cannot be understood but who is always very reliable. These images give perseverance to the African Christian in his/her suffering, convinced that Christ will not desert him/her^{x1}.

CONCLUSION

Corruption is existent in most governments, and it is not peculiar to any continent, region and ethnic group. It cuts across faiths, religious denominations and political systems and affects both young and old, man and woman alike. Corruption is found in *democratic* and *dictatorial* politics; feudal, capitalist and socialist economies. Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist cultures are equally bedevilled by corruption. Corrupt practices did not begin today; the history is as old as mankind. Ancient civilizations have traces of widespread illegality and corruption. Thus, corruption has been ubiquitous in complex societies from ancient Egypt, Israel, Rome, and Greece down to the present^{xli}. This does not, however, mean that the magnitude of corruption is equal in every society. Some countries are more corrupt than others! As George Orwell notes in his widely read book, Animal Farm: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others"xlii; therefore corruption is not peculiar to Africa, however, it is more in Africa. The leaders as well as the followers are corrupt. It seems to have defied all solutions. However, what this paper has tried to do is to map out its challenges to theology, hoping that this process would awaken and plunge theologians deeply into the ongoing fight against corruption, hoping that greater results would be achieved.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ The Neolithic Revolution occurred during the later part of the Stone Age, and with it, people moved on from social systems based on hunting and gathering to much more complex communities that depended on agriculture and domestication of animals. Glenn Porte, Industrial revolution. Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia, 2003

ⁱⁱ The Industrial Revolution occurred during the 17th and 18th centuries which brought a shift from agricultural societies created during the Neolithic Revolution to more industrial societies. Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Kanu Anthony, "The Colonial Legacy: The Hidden history of Africa's Present Crisis". In View Point Magazine, 2007. Vol. 6, No. 7, p. 38

^{iv} The Agrarian Revolution was a period when in many parts of the world, the masses fought for their rights, their lands, against oligarchy and imperialism. Landlords and capitalist backed up by imperialists. The successes attained marked a turning point in the life of the nations involved. Sabino Padilla, Agrarian Revolution: Peasant Radicalization and Social Change in Bicol (Philippines: Kalikasan, 1991), p.1.

^v Kanu Anthony, "A Critical Evaluation of the Progress of Scientific Technology". In View Point Magazine, Vol. 3. No.4. 2004.

^{vi}John Odey, Africa, The Agony of a Continent: Can Liberation Theology Offer Any Solution? (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1996), p. 5.

^{vii} Mordi C, & Afangide F., "Corruption: Nigeria's Existential question". In The Quest Vol.2.2 June 2001-July 2002. p.21.

^{viii} Victor E. Dike, "Corruption in Nigeria: A New Paradigm for Effective Control". In Africa Economic Analysis. Retrieved 20th August 2008. www.AfricaEconomicAnalysis.org.

^{ix} Efeturi Ojakaminor, Nigeria's Ghana Must Go Republic: Happenings (Ogun: Ambassador Publications, 2004), p. 418

^x Patrick Smith, Corruption Costs Africa Billions. BBC Focus on Africa, Monday, 2 January 2006, 16:45 GMT.

^{xi} John Mary Walliggo, "The External Debt in the Continued Marginalization of Africa". A Paper presented during the occasion of celebrating the Jubilee Year 2000, Uganda Martyr University, May 2000, p.10.

^{xii} Francis Uneka, Thowing the Glacial System of Africa. In Gleaner Magazine. Vol.1, No. 10. 2007-2008, p.5.

^{xiii} Dagin Sylvester, Bring Back the Lost Daughters: A Fight Against Trafficking of Nigerian Women and Girls for International Sex Market (Jos: Fab Educational Books, 2005), p.45.

^{xiv}John Odey, The Anti-Corruption crusade, the Saga of a Crippled Giant (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2001), pp. 41-42

^{xv} John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, Ecclesia in Africa, No. 41. Retrieved 20th August, 2008.<u>http://search.sweetim.com/search.asp?src=2&q=ecclesia+in+africa+Pope+John+Paul+I</u>.

I. ^{xvi} Martin, L, & Lenz, G., Corruption, Culture, and Markets, in Culture Matters, Lawrence E. Harrison, and Samuel P. Huntington, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 112

^{xvii} Lipset, L, & Lenz, G., Corruption, Culture, and Markets, in Culture Matters, p.112

^{xviii} Mauro, Paolo, Why Worry About Corruption. In IMF Publications: Economic Issues, No. 6, 1997.

xix Callaghy, Thomas, Africa: falling off the Map; Current History, January 1994, pp.31-36

^{xx} John Odey. "Poverty In Africa Is Man-Made". In The Gleaner Magazine. Vol.1 No.10. 2007/2008, p.85

^{xxi} Leonardo Boff & Clodovis Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology (Brazil: Burns and Oats, 1987), p.55.

^{xxii} Critical thinking is better understood in contrast to naïve thinking, while the naïve thinker is preoccupied with accepting the normalized structures, the critical thinker is concerned with the continuing transformation of reality, for the sake of the continuing humanization of people. Stan Anih, Modern Approaches to Classroom Learning. A Paper Presented During A Workshop Organized by the Educational Tax Fund For Teacher Educators in Colleges of Education, 2004, p.2.

^{xxiii} Creative thinking is a process of reasoning that allows for the free interplay of the imagination, originality and constructiveness to bring about something new and challenging. Stan Anih, Modern Approaches to Classroom Learning, p.2

^{xxiv} Caring thinking is a thinking process that has got to do with the welfare of people. Stan Anih, Modern Approaches to Classroom Learning, p.2

^{xxv} Lateral thinking is a way of solving problems that allows for the exploration of new thought processes, Stan Anih, Modern Approaches to Classroom Learning, p.2

^{xxvi} A style of thinking that can hardly be challenged by contemporary thought patterns. Stan Anih, Modern Approaches to Classroom Learning, p.2

^{xxvii} Systemic thinking is a process of reasoning that allows us to effectively formulate a way of life that eliminates biased, provocative and prejudiced thinking patterns. Stan Anih, Modern Approaches to Classroom Learning, p.2

^{xxviii} Synergic thinking it is a pattern of reasoning by which the sets of components or life activities work together for the overall interest of the whole. Stan Anih, Modern Approaches to Classroom Learning, p.2

^{xxix} John Odey. Africa, The Agony of a Continent: Can Liberation Theology Offer Any Solution? p.70.

^{xxx} Juan Luis Segundo, Our Idea of God: A Theology For a New Humanity (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), p. 172.

^{xxxi} John Mary Walliggo, "The External Debt in the Continued Marginalization of Africa". A Paper presented during the occasion of celebrating the Jubilee Year 2000, Uganda Martyr University, May 2000, p.15.

^{xxxii} John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, (September 14, 1995), p.54.

^{xxxiii} L' Osservatore Romano, April 13, 1994, p.4.

^{xxxiv} Emmanuel Martey, African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p.50

^{xxxv} John Paul II, Centesimus Annus. May 1, 1991, p.57.

^{xxxvi} Rodrigo Mejia (ed.), The Conscience of the Society: The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church Bishops of Kenya 1960-1995 (Nairobi: Pauline Publications of Africa, 1995), p.50.

^{xxxvii} Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi, 8 December, 1975, No. 29. Retrieved 20th May, 2011. <u>http://search.sweetim.com/search.asp?q=evangelii%20nuntiandi&ln=en&src=1002&lcr=0</u>

^{xxxviii} John Waliggo, African Christology in a Situation of Suffering. Robert Schreiter (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 164.

xxxix Monica Hellwig, Jesus the Compassion of God (Dublin: Star Press, 1983), p. 21.

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^{xl} John Waliggo, African Christology in a Situation of Suffering. p. 176.
^{xli} L, & Lenz, G., Corruption, Culture, and Markets, in Culture Matters, pp.112-113
^{xlii} George Orwell, Animal Farm (Lagos: Bertie-John, 1996), p.109