Justice and Contentment: Panaceas to Bribery and Corruption in the Nigerian Society

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Abstract

Corruption in Nigeria has reached an unprecedented proportion in recent times. Its daily rise is an indicator that the "monster" appears to elude all known solutions. This work is aimed at contributing to the ongoing search for a Christian response in curbing corruption in Nigeria. A preliminary review of literature reveals that corruption, which has become endemic in Nigeria, is a bane on her development and economic prosperity. In an attempt to curb it, several suggestions have been put forth by scholars, organizations, and various stakeholders across the country. However, the beam light has not been focused much on contentment and justice which this piece refers us toa biblical principle/virtue tobe harnessed by public office holders, and all and sundry. This biblical principle can be contextualized to minimize corruption in Africa. Using a systematic review of literature as well as biblical exegesis and interpretation, the work argues that,lack of the application of biblical principles of justice and contentmentare the reasons,bribery and corruption continue to unleash mayhem in Nigeria.Thus, if all stakeholders and leaders will be content

with their pay, instead of cutting corners to loot public funds for personal advantage, bribery and corruption would have been minimized drastically if not completely eliminated. It also recommended that biblical concept of contentment and justice should be emphasized notonly in places of worship but in various capacity-building workshops for public office holders in various in Nigeria.

Key words: Justice, Contentment, Corruption, Bribery.

Introduction

Bribery and corruption are detrimental to the development of any society the world over. Where bribery and corruption strive, the society is bound to be in total disarray. Events in Nigeria in recent times have shown that bribery and corruption hold the potential to set any society in economic retrogression. The indices of corruption abound and stare us on the face. Reports of government agents, leaders and stakeholders' involvement in corruption across the length and breadth of Nigeria, are mindboggling. Only recently, a former Minister of power was arraigned for misappropriation of the sum of 33 billion naira earmarked for power project. A former Accountant General of the Federation spearheaded the misappropriation of over a 100 billion naira. A suspended mister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management has herself become a disaster to Nigeria through the misappropriation of over 30 billion naira. These and other high profile corruption cases are telling on the kind of society we create for ourselves.

From the foregoing therefore, justice and contentment can be said to be the like panaceas to these arrays of financial misappropriations. Justice thus, is a legal orphilosophical theory by which fairness is administered.Hence, Plato's take on justice is that of having and doing what is one's own.That is, individually, justice is a human virtue that makes a person self-consistent and good(Rembrandt 2024).Justice is also the use of authority and power to uphold what is right, just, or lawful, which has been abused so much that it has led people to engage in all manners of acts,with bribery and corruption as a fall out.This has become prevalent in almost all human endeavours and Nigeria has a fair share of it. Thus, it is suggested that if justice and contentment will be upheld in allhuman endeavours,bribery, whichhappens to be one of the worst aspectsof

corruption,would at least be reduced to the barest minimum. This paper therefore, attempts to look at justice and contentment from biblical point of view in order to the tides against the soaring cases of corruption and bribery in the Nigerian society.

Conceptual Clarifications

The following key words are here clarified:

i. Corruption:

The term corruption is difficult to define because it is multifaceted. However, it is viewed by many scholars and several organizations in different ways but with similar underpinnings. For instance, the Dictionary of Oxford Languages defines corruption as a dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typicallyinvolvingbribery.The Transparency Internationalon its part definesit as the abuse of entrusted power for personal or private gain. What appears to be central to these definitions is that corruption is a practice that focuses on individual interest as against collective interest.That is to say, public function or objective is set aside and priority is on individual (Bitrus, 225). Within this understanding, Transparency International adds that this abuse of entrusted power downplays trust, weakens democracy, which ordinarily should be the number one promoter of the welfare of the citizenry (ibid, 225). It hampers economic development and further promotes inequality, poverty, and social division.

Corruption is also seen 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 (Khan, 43). This of course further speaks of this menace as impairment of integrity, virtue, or moral principle or to say, a change from a state of uprightness, correctness, truth to a bad state. Simply put, corruption is a breach of the rule of law which could further explain that Africa and indeed, Nigeria is at war with itself (Bitrus, 225).

More so, Corruption, according to Transparency International can take many formsand include behaviours such as:

a. Demanding or taking money or something in exchange for services. This form of corruption is prevalent on the side of public servants.

b. Using political power to gain access to the treasury to channel monies for personal/private use. In this case, political office holders, grand public jobs or contracts to their sponsors and families and expect kickbacks. This they do at the detriment of the majority.
c. Giving out something by corporations to get some lucrative deals. All these can happen anywhere and can involve anyone.

In line with the foregoing ways in which corruption pervades integrity,Kunhiyop (165) mentions bribery, extortion, fraud, nepotism, all of which constitute the giving of money to someone in a position for a favour or to cut corners, obtaining money from someone or an organization through threats or violence, getting money or any valuable through forging of signatures, inflating cost and appointing relatives or friends to a position. In this case, one's qualification does not matter. Corruption also manifests itself in vote-buying, alteration of election results, sports match-fixing, buying and selling of examination questions and marking schemes among others.Otite (32) in his clarification of corruption, sums up all these into political, economic, bureaucratic, judicial and moral corruption, covering all forms of manipulations and practices that are morally unacceptable.

From the definitions and explanations above, it is evident that corruption is:

a. The misuse of position for personal or private advantage. This also translates to an abuse of privilege.
b. An act that undermines development, as funds meant for it, are diverted for personal gain. In this case, corruption is seen as an anti-human activity, and
c. An act that suppresses a system and oppresses people and manifests itself in several forms.

Therefore, corruption as used in this work is unlawful taking of money or any valuable, meant for private or public use, for one's benefit as against what the law provides. It is using one's position for undue advantage to the detriment of others. It is also having too much than what one requires, unlawfully.

ii. Contentment:

Webster's New International Dictionary (559) defines contentment as the "State or quality of being content." It has to do with one having the desires limited to that which is available to one, and it is disposed to grumble or complain. Simply put, contentment is an act of being satisfied or pleased especially, habitual satisfaction or mental ease, and quietude, freedom from dissatisfaction, anxiety, or agitation. It is a state of accepting a situation as it is and this of course said to be the milder and more tentative form of happiness. It is also clear from this definition that contentment is opposed to achieving one's larger ambitions.From the foregoing, contentment, as used in this work, is the act of being fulfilled, happy and patient with whatever one has and sharing same with those in need. The implication is that when one is satisfied with whatever is at his disposal, the rate of cutting corners would drastically reduce.

iii. Justice:

According to Kwayasand Jalo (74) Justice is nothing but fairness, equity, honesty, truth, fear of God, sincerity, impartial human rights, faithfulness etc.They went on further to say that justice is what keeps a community together, be it a country, state or local government, chiefdom, districts or villages, only justice can be the pillar that keeps the society together. The Bible explains justice as to give someone what he/she deserves according to God's command (Genesis 18: 19; Exodus 3: 6). Justice is care for the poor and the weak people in the society. Justice is characterized by giving everyone what he/she deserves without discrimination.Justice is also seen as a concept of Moral Tightness based on administration of law taking into account the inalienable and inborn rights of all human beings and citizens.The right of all people and individuals to equal protection before the law of their civil rights without discrimination on the basis of race, gender, a national origin, colour, ethnicity, religion, disability, age or other characteristics.

Corruption in the Bible

A cursory look or study of the Bible indicates that corruption as used in this work, is not in tandem with the will of God. It is an act that jeopardizes the mission of God and it is a sin with grievous consequences. This is because God, from the beginning created everything good, but the disobedience of Adam and Eve brought

contamination and decay (Genesis 3: 1ff). So, corruption is first and foremost presented in the Scripture or Bible as the State of moral contamination and spiritual decay expressed through disobedience towards God. This understanding describes the situation in Nigeria, where people in position of authority and/or power, break the law and cut corners for their personal benefits.

The Old Testament Prophets are understood to be literally and boldly standing against some religious, economic, social, and political issues that constituted what we understand today as corruption, which has led to spiritual decay in the lives of God's people. The corruption which was at its peak produced the poor, the needy, the forgotten, the under-privileged, and the victims of injustices in the society. Prophets like Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah stood their grounds and spoke against corrupt practices of their days. This, they did by boldly speaking to the powers that be that were oppressing and suppressing the poor (Isaiah 3: 14; Jeremiah 2: 34).

During the time of Amos, for instance, the society was stratified and social abuses were the order of the day. Life for the poor was burdensome because the rich used their material prosperity to cheat and oppress them. Political leaders subsisted largely on bribes and they put their confidence in their military and strategic strength (Amos 8: 6; 2: 7; 4: 1; 5: 11-12; 8: 4).This is exactly the case in Nigeria. In difficult times, the poor and the needy are forced to pay exorbitant interest rates (Amos 5: 11), business dealings were dishonest; merchants falsified their weights and measures. The messages of the prophets like John the Baptist were always the message of exhortation and hope, a call to be faithful in their dealings and to the covenant so that they could reap the benefit thereof(Ikenna, 185 – 6).

The New Testamenton the other hand, portrays corruption as "something that affects every aspect of the personality of a human being" (Ephesians 4: 22; 2Peter 1: 4). It is expressedin the mind, conscience, and also in character (1Timothy 6: 5; Titus 1: 15; 1Corinthians 15: 33). Simply put, it is the violation of God's divine injunction with the solution being in the righteousness and holiness of God. This understanding supports the need for a Christian response to the situation in Nigeria. It is also clear that the Love Jesus extended to the poor shows his

disapproval of all corrupt tendencies and also what to do. So, corruption in both the Old and the New Testaments is an act that is frowned at.

The Problem

The world is afflicted with a great number of corrupt practices which bribery is one of the common and most damaging. Bribery is money, property or privilege offered in order to entice or influence another party into providing something that the briber wants. People in positions of authority in government, business and even the Church today often demand and/or expect bribes or inducement before they render a service to applicants or customers or members of the congregation. Often, those who receive salaries for the work they are employed to do, actually refused to do that work unless they receive or get a reward from those they are paid to serve (Norman, 183).The dividing line between a gift and a bribe is sometimes hard to draw. It is the motive behind the gift that can turn it into a bribe and make it wrong. A gift given in genuine appreciation of another's kindness is not a bribe, but when a gift is offered or promised with the aim of influencing the recipient in favour of the giver, the so-called gift becomes a bribe. And whenever something is demanded before a service is rendered or an activity permitted, that demand is not for a gift but for a bribe.

Corruption on the hands isan 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. This of course further speaks of this menace as put forward by Nelson as impairment of integrity, virtue, or moral principle or to say, a change from a state of uprightness, correctness, truth to a bad state. Simply put, corruption is a breach of the rule of law which could further explain that Nigeria is at war with itself.Otite(6-7) in his clarification of corruption sums up all these into political, economic, bureaucratic, judicial and moral corruption, covering all forms of manipulations and practices that are morally unacceptable. These issues are multifaceted:

i. A Prevalent Practice

In many parts of the world, bribery and corruption is prevalent and it is virtually impossible for anyone to get about his normal business or to get what he needs or

what is his entitlement without resorting to it. Often there is intimidation or the threat of punishment for those who refuse to pay up. Vigilante groups or even police or soldiers operating 'check points' can refuse to allow travelers to pass unless they put money into their hands. Where that is the case, justice and the basic rights of the individual are denied to those who cannot or who will not pay bribes. Those who demand such bribes are guilty of the crime of extortion.

ii. A Two-Level Practice

Bribery and corruption, which is always a denial of justice, tends to operate at two levels:

a. When a person is focused to give a bribe in order to gain something, which is rightfully his. It is sometimes argued that giving bribe to get what is rightfully one's own, for example, money held in a bank or examination results held by a school, is part of life in a fallen world and something no one can avoid. Those who maintain this position regard such bribery as morally innocent or virtually so. However, many Christians think that even such bribery is immoral and steadfastly refuse to meet demands for it. They argue that God will honour their stand and will work things out for their good (Romans 8: 28).In such cases, the greater offense is certainly that of the person who demands the bribe before granting someone what is his or hers by right.

b. When a person voluntarily gives a bribe to obtain something to which he has no legal entitlement. Examples would be the provision of a false driving license or passport, falsified examination results, employment for which one has no proper qualifications because the goal is not to obtain what is one's own right, but to obtain something to which one has no entitlement. This is more serious form of bribery and corruption and is always a perversion of justice. Demanding and giving such bribes can have no place in the Christian life. It is, as we shall see now, clearly excluded by the teachings of Scripture.

Bribery in the Scripture

In the Bible, bribery and corruption is always condemned as out of harmony with the will of God. Some well-known instances can be cited:

a. **Jacob attempting to bribe Esau**
   Possibly the earliest incident of bribery is that in which Jacob met his brother Esau more than 14 years after he had cheated him of birthright and fatherly blessings.

b. **The sons of Eli**
   The sons of Eli turned out to be thoroughly bad priests (1 Samuel 2: 12 – 17). God had provided that, when his people offered animal sacrifices, the priests should have a share of the meat for themselves (Leviticus 7: 31 – 36). The sons of Eli violated that system by forcefully demanding the choicest pieces of the animal's flesh at the beginning of the ceremony. They had to be bribed and so intimidate worshippers by refusing to perform their religious duties until they got what they wanted. Scripture says, the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of then Lord.

c. **The sons of Samuel**
   Before Samuel's death, his two sons were appointed to serve as judges in their father's place. But sadly, they didn't have their father's integrity and soon turned to corruption and being greedy for gain, "they took bribes and perverted justice (1 Samuel 8: 3). They resorted to bribery and corruption and perverted justice for the individuals who sought judgment from them.

d. **The Guards at Jesus' tomb**
   At the time of our Lord's resurrection, those guarding his tomb reported what happened to the chief priest of the day. The news was embarrassing to the Jewish leaders, because if Jesus were still alive, their aim of getting rid of him would appear to have failed or defeated. It was also a very serious matter for soldiers because if Pilate, the Roman governor heard about it, they would have been charged with dereliction of duty and might have been crucified too (Matthew 27: 62 – 66).

e. Felix seeking a bribe from Paul

When Paul was sent to Caesarea as a prisoner, he had to defend himself before Felix, the Roman governor of the day. Felix, who already had some understanding of the Christian way, and his wife, who was a Jewess, followed up the court hearing by sending for and actually listening to Paul speaking about 'faith in Jesus Christ' (Acts 24: 22 – 24). It is unlikely, however, that Felix had little, if any, real interest in what Paul taught because, as Luke was able to add 'he was hoping that Paul would offer him bribe.' It was for that reason that 'he sent for him frequently and talked with him' (Acts 24: 26).

Warnings:

When Moses received the law at Mount Sinai, the ordinances that accompanied it, included a law against bribery and corruption – 'You shall take no bribe, for bribe blinds the clear-sighted, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right' (Exodus 23: 8). When he repeated and elaborated the law at the end of the wilderness wanderings, he called on his people to fear, to love and to serve the Lord because, as he puts it, "The Lord is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes (Deuteronomy 10: 17; Cf 2 Chronicles 19:7).

The Evils of Bribery and Corruption

Evil is an essential element in all bribery and corruption. It is so much part of it that it is impossible to give or to receive bribes without being corrupted by it. Bribery is corruption in all its ramifications.

i. It is gross selfishness.

Those who demand and take bribes seek gain for themselves. They are dominated by selfishness and serve money (mammon) rather than God. Bribery is essentially an expression of selfish greed and it is therefore, what Paul called idolatry (Colossians 3: 5), putting of money in place of God.

ii. It degrades those who practice it

Those who take bribes are locked into justice, because they are forced, by virtue of receiving a bribe, to award favour on an unjust basis. Their eyes

become blinded to wisdom and justice. They become addicted to and dominated by this method of getting gain and, as happens with any addiction, their personalities are degraded, because they become less and less able to resist the temptation. They become slaves to their habits.

iii. It perverts justice and fairness

By taking bribes, the sons of Samuel and Eli 'perverted justice.' Bribery always means that good and upright people cannot get a fair deal. Amos put it clearly as he; the prophet addressed the people of Israel; You who turn justice into bitterness. And cast the righteous to the ground …You who oppress the righteous and take bribes. And you deprive the poor of justice in the courts (Amos 5: 7 & 12). Because bribery affects the righteous and deprives those in need of their rights, it can never be right and should never have a place in the life of a Christian. It estranges the guilty from God.

Conclusion:

Because bribery tends to become deeply ingrained in the mind-set of people, it cannot be solely stamped out by laws or by the Police or other law enforcements action. Bribery and corruption will only be eliminated from the world and from our systems and our societies, when the hearts of the people are changed and embrace contentment and justice by inwardly determined to abandon all forms of bribery and corruption completely. Since we do not have a truly Christian society anywhere in the world, bribery is likely to remain in the fabric of our societies and will only be totally eliminated when Christ returns and the old order passes away and is replaced by one of total righteousness.

Scripture focuses on the selfishness and the injustice of bribery and corruption and presents it as evidence of human greed or covetousness. The tenth (10^{th}) Commandment … 'You shall not covet ….' – is clearly incorporated into the 'Law of Christ' and as such is binding on every follower of Christ (Mark 7: 22; Luke 12: 15; Romans &: 7; 13: 9). God detests bribery and corruption as the society is damaged by it. It is clearly not for Christians. Christians must commit themselves never to engage in the extortion that is at the heart of every demand for a bribe. They must never make such unjust demands of other people. Extortion, in

whatever form, represent itself, and a very serious sin. To resort to it, is to place oneself among the ungodly and to damage or even destroy one's relationship to the Lord.

This work therefore, insist and recommend that justice and contentment as biblical virtue should be emphasized and embraced not only in our day-to-day affairs, as life style and should be included into school curricular at all levels of our learning, including our worship places; and also, a capacity building workshops for public office holders, the business communities and security agencies.

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