



CHRISTIANITY
AND THE CHALLENGE
OF
CORRUPTION
IN NIGERIA

Published by
Lux Terra Leadership Foundation

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of
CORRUPTION
in Nigeria**



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Lux Terra Complex, Villa Nova Estate, Apo-Dutse, Abuja,
Nigeria.

Phone: +234-9-2917336

Email: info@ltleadership.org

Website: www.ltleadership.org

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Foreword

by

Rev. Fr. George Ehusani

Executive Director, Lux Terra Leadership Foundation

Corruption is pervasive in Nigeria and poses a major challenge to national development. No sector or sphere of activity is spared: from education to law enforcement and the judiciary, from public procurement to commercial transactions, in both public and private entities, including religious institutions, corruption abounds. Instances of embezzlement, nepotism, favouritism, bribery and facilitation payments are the norm in day to day transactions. It is widely believed that corruption is the single most critical factor that explains how such a richly endowed country like Nigeria could be so economically stagnated and rendered so volatile with widespread political instability and social insecurity.

The root causes of corruption are complex and include economic factors such as poverty and inequality, governance-related factors such as impunity or failure of government to enforce the rule of law, and social factors that relate to certain belief systems, as well as cultural and societal norms. The government's anti-corruption campaign has often focused on a few incidents of "grand corruption" in state institutions, but has not done much in changing the mind-set of the people, the belief systems that fuel corruption, or the prevailing social norms in the Nigerian society where corrupt practices have nearly become a way of life. A holistic, multi-sector approach to fighting corruption has therefore become necessary.

Most Nigerians profess either Christianity or Islam, both of which espouse the ideals of truth, honesty, accountability, and the common good imperative. Corrupt practices are condemned as ungodly by both religions, and an abundant body of teachings of Islam and Christianity attest to this. Yet we religious people and our leaders have not often mobilised the resources of our religions sufficiently to fight corruption. Many among us are not

even sufficiently aware of the damage corruption has done, and has continued to do to our society. Some of our religious leaders are not adequately equipped to use our religious teachings in an effective manner to form their own social consciences and that of the general public against corrupt practices.

Yet corruption is poised to destroy our country completely, and rob its citizens of any hope of dignified existence. Corruption has been responsible for the triumph of mediocrity and the flight of excellence in our land, seen from the quality persons that emerge as leaders at all levels and in nearly all sectors, in the quality of graduates churned out by our educational institutions, and in the quality of local artisans that service our social and domestic facilities. Corruption has been responsible in large measure for our major infrastructural deficit and infrastructural decay, from roads to schools and hospitals. Corruption has been responsible for the continuous brain drain – the emigration of key professionals and able-bodied youths to greener pastures all over the world. Corruption has been responsible for capital flight and large scale divestment of major multi-national companies from Nigeria to countries like South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana. The collapse of such major agencies like Nigeria Airways and NITEL, and the terrible fate of such gigantic projects like the Ajaokuta and Aladja steel complexes, can be blamed squarely on corruption. Corruption is also to be blamed to a reasonable degree for today's high rate of unemployment, and the accompanying youth restiveness, rampant criminality, widespread mental distress, socio-political instability, and in some way even the inability of our governments to deal effectively with the terrorist groups that have brought so much agony and pain.

It is said that “if we do not change our course, we would end up where we are headed.” We must all reflect on the dire consequences of continuing business as usual. The Nigerian system or the organism we call Nigeria, can only bear a certain amount of rot and decay, beyond which it is certain to collapse. If we do not kill corruption, it is sure to kill all of us very soon. As we

keep adding infidelity to infidelity, a time will come when there will be no remedy. (See 2 Chronicles 36:14-16).

We still have the chance to repent and draw ourselves back from the edge of the precipice. If we do not act now, in only a few years, we may have no country to call our home. We are already having low intensity conflicts here and there. We may soon get to the tipping point where we would be face to face with high intensity conflicts, if we do not act fast to stop the scourge of corruption. We at Lux Terra Leadership Foundation however believe in the possibility of change by the power of Him who makes all things new. We believe that God loves our country dearly, and that is why Nigeria is still managing to exist as one single political entity, in spite of everything we have done to destroy ourselves.

It is based on our recognition of this immense love of God for our dear country, and the fact that a spiritual and moral revolution is possible for the leadership and people of Nigerians that we have undertaken the project of this booklet, which is meant to be a reading material to help all Christians come to the realisation that all acts of corruption are a violation of our religious commitment. The material is intended to equip not only priests, pastors and other Christian religious leaders, but also leaders of youth and women groups in Churches and educational institutions across the country, with Scripture-based resources to live lives of integrity themselves, to promote integrity, and fight against acts of corruption, in all spheres of life in Nigeria.

The publication and free distribution of Christianity and the Challenge of Corruption in Nigeria for the general public in Nigeria, is only one among the many initiatives undertaken by the Lux Terra Leadership Foundation with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. In partnership with the Development Initiative of West Africa (DIWA) – our Minna-based Islamic partners, we have also undertaken the publication and distribution of Islam and the Challenge of Corruption in Nigeria. Other initiatives in the MacArthur sponsored Anti-Corruption

Campaign include a series of training courses for Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders, including youth and women leaders, on the Effective Use of Religious Resources, Institutions and Networks, to fight corruption and promote integrity in Nigeria; a series of Public Forums (or Town Hall meetings) in a cross-section of cities across the country on the urgent need to fight corruption and promote integrity for wholesome national development, security and peace; and a media campaign against corruption, targeted at the generality of Nigerians.

I am grateful to my young friends, Rev. Emmanuel Ojeifo who worked on the first draft of the booklet, and to Rev. Jerome Ituah, OCD, who gave the professional touch of a Scripture scholar to the Glossary on Corrupt Practices Condemned in the Bible. I am grateful to John Cardinal Onaiyekan who painstakingly went through the manuscript, and offered very useful suggestions on the structure of the material. I am grateful to the Lux Terra Editor, Mr. Gregory Aiyemo, who took time to cross the Ts and dot the Is with his accustomed diligence. Finally, I am grateful to the MacArthur Foundation for their support of the publication and free distribution of this booklet along with the other initiatives in the ongoing anti-corruption campaign. God bless you all.

The Pervasive Nature of Corruption in Nigeria

Religion features at the very beginning of our nation's constitution. In the preamble to the 1999 Nigerian constitution, it is affirmed that we intend to live together as one united country under God. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of Nigerians are religious people. We believe in the supremacy of God. We believe that God is the very basis of our individual lives and our corporate existence. We believe in and relate with supernatural realities through prayers and supplications and through the offering of sacrifices. We find churches and sundry prayer houses everywhere in the land. We take part in crusades, worship sessions and vigils; we offer sacrifices and observe fasting days and religious holidays; and we go in large numbers on religious pilgrimages.

With all this show of religiosity or outward display of piety, one would have expected to see a very high degree of social morality in Nigeria, since all world religions generally promote truth, justice, honesty and probity. But this is not to be the case with us. There is an embarrassing contradiction between the high ethical demands of the two religions which the majority of Nigerians profess, and the phenomenon of corruption, greed and graft that has earned our country the unenviable status of being one of the most corrupt nations of the world. Some keen observers of the phenomenon actually say that corruption is so endemic in the Nigerian society that the socio-economic and political system can almost not function without it. Alongside religiosity, corruption in its many shapes and sizes is booming in Nigeria - from the petty bribery taken by the clerk in the office or the policeman at the check-point, to the grand corruption by which huge project contracts are hurriedly awarded, not for the sake of the common good, but because of the greed of the awarding official, who requires some money via contract "kick-backs."

Fraud, thievery and roguery are the order of the day, even as our environment is awash with prayers and ritual sacrifices to the God of truth, justice and holiness. It doesn't seem to be a matter of contradiction for many highly placed Nigerians that they embezzle or misappropriate stupendous amounts of public and company (or even church) funds, while at the same time struggling to occupy the front seats or even take religious titles and other honours in their churches. Examination malpractice in its numerous manifestations, is witnessed on a wide scale from the common entrance examination organised for the placement of 10 year-olds into colleges to the final qualifying examination at the Nigerian Law School. It is alleged that unscrupulous parents, irresponsible teachers, and mercenary proprietors, are not only accomplices, but sometimes initiators of these shameful practices.

Many Nigerians often fraudulently procure medical certificates of fitness from hospitals when they have not undergone any medical tests. They also obtain sick leave permits from doctors, when they are hale and hearty. They sometimes falsify the age of their children and obtain fake birth certificates in order to get them into nursery or primary schools earlier than the law stipulates. They routinely swear to false affidavits in order to obtain citizenship certificates and make false age declarations when seeking employment or admission into institutions of learning. Many Nigerians who today hold drivers' licences, have never seen what a Vehicle Inspection Office (V.I.O.) testing ground looks like. They simply pay for the license and declare themselves drivers, putting at risk not only their lives, but also the lives of other road users. Oath taking in our law courts with the Bible in hand and the declaration to "speak the truth, and nothing but the truth," has become an empty ritual for many Nigerians who go ahead to commit perjury and slander, after making such solemn declaration with the most sacred symbol of their faith.

Many Nigerians, including seemingly pious Christians, who would go to war in defence of their religions, have no qualms of conscience when they pay to obtain yellow cards without the

necessary inoculation for which the card is supposed to be evidence. Many of our countrymen and women who flock our churches on Sunday are at one time or the other involved in such fraudulent activities as evading tax, issuing and obtaining of fake receipts, over-invoicing and under-invoicing, importation of fake drugs, petty and large-scale bribery, fake audit reports, “creative book-keeping,” “round-tripping,” advance fee fraud, election rigging, inflation of census figures, etc. All these practices are so commonplace and so widespread that many young Nigerians are today unable to distinguish between good and evil or between right and wrong.

Thus, corruption in Nigeria has been described as systemic. And the unwholesome consequences are legion. Corruption has bred inefficiency and diminished productivity in both the public and private sectors of the economy. It is responsible in large measure for what many now call “the triumph of mediocrity” in the land. It has discouraged investment, fuelled capital flight and increased inflation. Corruption has increased unemployment and turned many Nigerian youth into drug addicts. It has created an acute degree of poverty, brought about a severe decline in the quality of life and life expectancy in Nigeria, sent millions of our people to their early graves, sent some of our best brains out of the country in search of greener pastures, and given Nigeria and Nigerians a terribly bad image in the eyes of the international community. Corruption is perhaps the single most critical causative factor in the ruination of our country. It has turned the overwhelming majority of citizens of an otherwise richly endowed nation into paupers and sometimes miserable objects of petty foreign aid. Indeed corruption is an affront on human dignity and an assault on the human conscience, apart from being a negation of the Christian vocation to promote truth, holiness and righteousness in the world.

Corruption has been a major obstacle on our way to achieving a vibrant democratic culture, where the rule of law is in place, rather than the state of impunity or executive lawlessness that we so often witness. On account of the culture of corruption in the land, institutions of state and public offices have often lost

their legitimacy, as many of those who occupy positions of public trust tend to use those positions to loot public resources or simply to further personal or group interests. Many heads of institutions often place family members, tribesmen, members of their religious groups, and cronies in critical technical positions that such persons are not qualified to occupy. Such heads of institutions are often simply using their positions to “settle” their relations or provide “job for the boys,” and in this way the capacity of the institutions to deliver the goods and services for which they are established is seriously hampered.

Many heads of institutions themselves have often been square pegs in round holes – ill-qualified for the positions they occupy. They too were often placed in those positions not because they were the best qualified, but because they were cronies of the appointing executives. Public officers have often allocated scarce public resources to programmes and projects that are of no benefit whatsoever to the common good, programmes and projects that are designed to line their pockets rather than benefit communities. Such public officers are constantly on the lookout for white elephant projects that offer the best prospects for personal enrichment, rather than those that prioritise the needs of the people - such as schools, hospitals, roads, and electricity. In this way state resources are channelled into kickbacks, bribery and outright stealing.

Corruption destroys the very fabric of society. It violates laid down procedure. It circumvents rules and regulations. It undermines the right ordering and wholesome development of society. Corruption deprives the poor of basic goods and services, as access to these services is often skewed in favour of the rich and well connected, while excluding the less privileged or those who cannot afford to pay bribes to access basic social services. The cumulative consequence of all these anomalies is the triumph of mediocrity, the collapse of critical state infrastructure, and the loss of confidence in institutions of state and those who superintend them.

What is Corruption?

A general overview of corruption, its causes and effects on the society is important to provide understanding of how the Bible and the Christian religion approaches the issue. Whenever the word “corruption” is mentioned, several other related concepts and ideas come to mind such as bribery, dishonesty, immorality, fraud, theft, lies, injustice, greed, unfair play, deceit, extortion, and lack of integrity. Even if the term is confined to its narrowest meaning, there is no doubt that the Holy Scriptures condemns it in very strong terms. The word corruption comes down to us straight from the Latin *corruptio* and it means to bribe, to falsify, to pervert, to seduce, to tempt or to beguile. To corrupt is to violate or infringe on something. The word is first used in the Latin Vulgate Bible (4th century) for the original sin of Adam and Eve. They deviated from God's plan for them because they allowed themselves to be lured by the temptation of Satan. By turning away from God's instruction and following their own desires, they lost the original state of harmony and happiness in which they were created. Similarly, every act of corruption discussed in the Bible is always a violation of God's law by man in pursuit of selfish desires.

The Christian religion provides some of the best spiritual, moral and ethical resources for understanding what corruption entails and for combating it. There are ample resources and text in the Bible to demonstrate God's condemnation of various forms of dishonest dealing, misconduct and unscrupulous behaviour. As such, when the Bible speaks about corruption, it refers to a whole range of immoral and unethical behaviour that offends God, violates his commandments and causes harm to others. The Bible strongly condemns all these acts because they are sinful and involve the perversion of justice. From a biblical and social point of view, corruption affects peoples and societies in many adverse ways. It reduces the motivation to work hard, perverts justice, and betrays trust. Thus, it hinders the efficient

and effective functioning of society. It also incurs God's wrath upon a corrupt person. Corrupt practices increase the preponderance of corruption, thus creating a chain of corrupt practices that lead to societal collapse.

Corruption has to do with dishonest, unethical or fraudulent conduct by a person entrusted with a position of authority, often to acquire personal benefit. According to Transparency International, the global anti-corruption initiative, corruption is “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.” This can take place in different settings and in different forms and shades. Transparency International classifies corruption into three: grand, petty and political, depending on the amounts of money involved and the sector where it occurs. “Grand corruption consists of acts committed at a high level of government that distorts policies or the central functioning of the state, enabling leaders to benefit at the expense of the public good. Petty corruption refers to everyday abuse of entrusted power by low- and mid-level public officials in their interactions with ordinary citizens, who often are trying to access basic goods and services in places like hospitals, schools, police departments and other agencies. Political corruption is the manipulation of policies, institutions and rules of procedure in the allocation of resources and financing by political decision makers, who abuse their position to sustain their power, status and wealth.”

What does the Bible say about Corruption?

The Bible condemns various practices, which amount to corruption. Every act of corruption is seen as a violation of God's covenant relationship with his people. A covenant is an agreement, pact or contract between two or more people. In the Bible, the term refers to a formal treaty like commitment to a relationship. Biblical covenants brought about a relationship of commitment between God and his people. One of the most important covenants God made was with the nation of Israel. On Mount Sinai, the Israelites, delivered from slavery in Egypt entered into a covenant with God. When God sent Moses to liberate the people of Israel from captivity in Egypt, he was moved by love and compassion. He said to Moses: "I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their oppressors, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." (Ex. 3:7-8).

Thus liberated, the people entered into a covenant with God on Mount Sinai in the wilderness. In this covenant, God promised to be with the entire nation of Israel and to protect and bless the people as they go into the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey. God told Moses to say this to the people: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:4-6). When Moses proclaimed these words to the people, they all replied: "We will do everything the Lord has said" (Ex. 19:8). These were their words of commitment to the covenant. As such, on their part, the people were to worship the One and Only True God and to observe all his laws and ordinances. All of this

was encapsulated in the Ten Commandments that God gave to the people through Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:1-17).

Most covenants include and define the duties, responsibilities and obligations of each party to the covenant. As with the covenant between God and Abraham, the covenant between God and Israel also contained conditions, duties and obligations. The people's acceptance of those conditions cemented their relationship with God. But their disobedience cut them off from the blessings God had promised. As demonstrated in the commandments, the covenant spelled out the terms of the people's relationship with God and their relationship with one another. A violation of the commandments was not just restricted to direct disobedience to God; when the people treated one another without love, justice and fairness, they also offended God.

In the holiness code of the Book of Leviticus, God spelled out the reward for obedience to the covenant relationship and the punishment for disobedience. "If you obey my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit... I will grant you peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid... I will look on you with favour and make you faithful and increase in numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you" (cf. Lev. 26:3-9). On the contrary, "If you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain because your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you. If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins several times over" (Lev. 26:14-18).

Simply put, the commandments, which were part of the terms of the covenant relationship between God and the people,

brought blessings and prosperity if the people were faithful to them. But they brought death and disaster if the people failed to observe them. This is explicitly stated in the Book of Deuteronomy: “See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees, and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed” (Deut. 30:15-18).

This notion of covenant was central to the worship and thinking of the chosen people of Israel. As we see in the Holiness Code of the Book of Leviticus, the concern was for holy living on the part of the people rather than a concern with sacrificial systems or ritual purity. The holy living to which the Holiness Code calls the people is to be exemplified in all arenas of their life: economic, social, political, familial, moral, and ethical. This is the foundation: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). To break the covenant was to rupture the relationship between God and his people and its call to righteous living. As one of the Wisdom Books points out, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to a people” (Prov. 14:34). On the verge of entering the Promised Land, Moses reminded the people once again of the covenant they had made with God on Mount Sinai (Deut. 4). He reiterated the Ten Commandments and all that it entailed for its proper observance (Deut. 5). The Commandments condemn idolatry, blasphemy, oppression, theft, murder, fornication, adultery, and lies; and promote true worship of God, respect for parents and constituted authority, and care for neighbour. It also established property rights. Among other elements, the commandments had a pedagogical character. The people were to transmit it and teach it to their children from generation to generation and to constantly reflect upon them. Hear what the Book of Deuteronomy says about this: “These commandments that I give you today shall be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you

sit at your home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates” (Deut. 6:4-9).

A fundamental commitment to the poor is prescribed explicitly: repaying their debts must not prevent a person from making a living (Deut. 24:6, 12f, 17); the dignity of the debtor must be respected (Deut. 24:10f); poor labourers are to be paid immediately (Deut. 24:14); the remaining crop of grain, olives and grapes after harvest shall serve the poor (Deut. 24:19-22). However, on several occasions, the people violated the terms of this covenant by worshipping pagan idols and disobeying God's commandments. The fault in that covenant relationship was with the *people*, not with the *covenant*. God fulfilled his part, but the Israelites failed to live up to the commitments they had made to God. “They did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in his law, and forgot his works and his wonders that he had shown them” (Ps. 78:10-11). On account of this, God punished them according to the terms of the covenant. They went into exile on account of their violation of the covenant amongst other forms of punishment meted out on them.

The concern of the prophets was to call the people back to the observance of the covenant their fathers had made with God. They kept reminding the people of the demands of the covenant and the importance of observing the injunctions and laws of God. God, speaking through the Prophet Jeremiah, reiterates the point of the covenant and how the people had violated it: “Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you that it may go well with you. But they did not listen or pay attention; instead they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward. From the time their forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again, I sent them my servants the prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers. When you tell them all this, they will not listen to you; when you call to them, they will not answer. Therefore say to

them, 'This is the nation that has not obeyed the Lord its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips'" (Jer. 7:23-28).

The Old Testament prophets provide ample ethical resources for social justice in the Christian tradition. They had a strong sense of social justice for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the oppressed and the marginalised. The prophets condemned several practices, which amounted to a violation of the covenant relationship between God and his people. Such practices include bribery, fraud, extortion, greed, dishonesty, etc. Very often, the prophets encapsulated the concern of the commandments and the covenant within the parameters of social justice. They sought to protect the poor from the corrupt and exploitative practices of the rich and powerful. Right worship of God was not to be divorced from the concern for justice, rectitude, and other social commitments.

The Prophet Amos vehemently opposed the oppression and exploitation of the poor by the rich and proclaimed God's impending wrath on those who trample down on the poor. The elite set up a system of taxation and trade that systematically and effectively dispossessed the poor of the land and the meagre resources they had to live on. The commercialisation of agriculture enabled the rich and privileged to export their produce in exchange for specialty items to support their rich life of leisure and conspicuous consumption. They used fine linen, expensive ornaments and perfume, all the while short-changing the poor. The elite sought many trade relations that focused on extracting the biggest economic gains possible, all at the expense of the poor.

To gain maximum economic advantage, more and more lands were converted for the production of commercial crops, leaving the staples that the peasantry needed for survival in short supply. This meant that in order to survive, the peasantry had to turn to the local markets – where the merchants took advantage of the peasantry – to buy food they once produced themselves. Consequently, the peasantry was in debt and in dire straits and

when it did not rain they had to borrow money to survive. Failure to repay their loans meant the foreclosure of their lands, which in turn served the aim of the elite to create large estates and commercialise agricultural activity. Turning to the courts was of no avail; controlled by the elite, the courts were biased and were used as an instrument by the elite to subvert justice.

Amos railed against this system of exploitation and oppression in very sharp terms. Condemning the social evils in the society of his time, he warned the rich that their hoarding, plundering and looting would not last (Am. 3:10). The people Amos denounces take their cut from the hard work of poor people through imposition of heavy tax (Am. 5:11), trample the head of the poor into the dust (Am. 2:7), oppress the poor and crush the needy (Am. 4:1), treat them with contempt and take bribes. When they sell wheat, they rig the scales and the currency (Am. 8:5). It is always the poor who are their victims. Amos also condemned the corrupt practices of the market merchants (Am. 8:5-6), the taking of interests and collateral on loans (Am. 2:6-8), the exacting of payment in kind (Am. 2:8), and the subverting of justice (Am. 5:7,10).

These ruthless exploiters are nameless, but they plainly have wealth and power. Their home is Samaria, the capital of the 8th century BC kingdom of Israel (Am. 3:9; 4:1; 6:1). Their crimes are many: they sell their debtors to slavery, they pervert justice in law courts through bribery and corruption, practise sexual immorality, exploit the poor, revel in drunkenness, and try to silence opposition to their crimes. In addition, the rich merchants overcharge the poor and sell them for a piece of silver or a pair of sandals. The poor are cheated on business deals, and goods sold to them are unfit for human consumption. When they challenge injustice in court, the poor are persecuted. They are also forced to work on the farm of the elite for little or no pay. Amos' condemnation of these evils was not just a blanket denunciation of sinfulness. He speaks about commerce in human life (Am. 2:6) and robbery with violence (Am. 3:10). People are so anxious to make money that they will take bribes, steal clothes, subvert justice and use falsified scales. In all these,

Amos shows that God demands justice from the leaders rather than hypocritical worship: "I hate, I despise your festivals... But let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (Am. 5:21-24). The preaching of Amos was dire: if the leaders of the kingdom do not change their ways for their better, they will face the worst consequences imaginable.

On his part, the Prophet Hosea criticises the excessive lifestyle of the elite. They drink so much wine that they become sick (Hos. 7:5), and formulate political and economic policies (Hos. 1:2-9; 7:7; 8:4). Those who live in luxury do not worry about the destitute at their doors, landowners are greedy, creditors are heartless, the rich in general are vain and irresponsible (Hos. 4:4-6; 5:1), and they murder the helpless (Hos. 6:8,9). For Hosea, these perversions are the result of the fact that Israel has forgotten and forsaken its Maker (Hos. 8:14; cf. 6:1-3). Prophesying at the same time as Amos and Hosea, the Prophet Micah criticised the elite for their ruthless acquisition of the lands of the poor (Mic. 2:2). He speaks of the ruling classes as cannibals who eat the flesh of those who are undernourished and fail to serve the cause of justice (Mic. 3:1-3). Condemning bribery and hypocrisy, Micah frontally attacked the leaders of the people: "You rulers make decisions based on bribes; your priests teach God's laws only for a price; you prophets won't prophesy unless you are paid. Yet all of you claim to depend on the Lord. 'No harm can come to us,' you say, 'for the Lord is here among us'" (Mic. 3:11).

Inspired by God's Spirit to build a society that ever more clearly protected human life and dignity, the Prophet Isaiah raised his voice in defence of the poor, calling for greater social justice. Time and again, Isaiah defended the poor and powerless. Pronouncing God's judgment on unjust leaders, Isaiah proclaimed: "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widow their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? Nothing will

remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain” (Is. 10:1-4). Isaiah also rebuked wicked leaders (Is. 56:9-12) and warned that God would not recognise ritual fasting because of the evils associated with it: “On the day of fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high” (Is. 58:3-4). He points out that the fasting that is pleasing to God is this: “to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke... to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood” (Is. 58:6-7). His vision of a just society is one in which, “The tyrant shall be no more... all those alert to do evil shall be cut off – those who... deny justice to the one in the right” (Is. 29:20-21).

Ezekiel scolded the leaders of Israel: “You did not strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured...but ruled them harshly and brutally” (Ez. 34:4). For Ezekiel, injustice happens when the powerful maltreat the poor, who are most of their fellow citizens by exploiting them and depriving them of their just wages, using coercion, bribery, dishonesty, legal technicalities and even violence to oppress and suppress them. It is this sort of behaviour among the powerful that brings God's judgment upon them. On the contrary, justice happens when those with power act honestly, generously and respectfully towards the poor (Ez. 18:5-9). While in exile, Ezekiel explains to the people the reason for their captivity.

Jeremiah was more concerned with injustice in the society of his time. He railed against the injustice inflicted on labourers who are defrauded of their wages: “Woe to him who builds his house on wrongdoing, his roof-chambers on injustice; who works his neighbour without pay, and gives them no wages” (Jer. 22:13). On the contrary, Jeremiah lauded King Josiah because he did “justice and righteousness” and “judged the cause of the poor and needy” (Jer. 22:15-16). Rather than exploit the poor, King Josiah deployed his powers to protect them from

being exploited. This is the idea of the just king that formed the vision of Isaiah for the future. The just king “shall judge the poor with righteousness” (Is. 11:1-9). In other words, he will give the poor the rights due to them. Greed and selfishness will be no more, “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Is. 11:19).

The entire prophetic tradition could be summarised as follows: God’s protection is predicated on the people’s keeping of the covenant. Two essential dimensions of the covenant are treating others well and putting common resources at the service of the common good. To be unjust or corrupt or exploitative is to break the covenant. The covenant was not just about rituals but oriented towards the goal of rectitude before God namely, “to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). To perform rituals and not to act in a godly manner is sinful. To basis for the constant repetition of the need for people to live godly lives is because ethical behaviour requires constant reminder and reinforcement. Hence the prophets constantly exhorted the people about the demands of justice, equity, and fairness. They also insisted on respecting the property of others and respecting every human life.

In the New Testament, John the Baptist taught on fairness and honesty. When the tax collectors asked what they should do to be saved, he said: “Don’t collect any more than you are required to” (Lk. 3:12). To the soldiers who asked in their turn, John said: “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay” (Lk. 3:14). In other words, John warned against corruption, false accusation, fraud, and the abuse of power for personal gain. He also taught on sexual morality when he condemned King Herod for forcibly taking his brother’s wife Herodias, a that cost him his life (cf. Mk. 6:17-18). John is an example of a leader who speaks the truth with courage and conviction.

In the New Testament, when the crowds respond to John the Baptist’s teaching, they ask how they should live (cf. Lk. 3:10-14). He specifically addresses a group of tax collectors and

soldiers. To each group he gives specific answers, but the principle of unselfishness is the common thread that runs through all his answers. John's answer to their question is that they should demonstrate genuine love and justice and that they should be content with their wages. An attitude of contentment will protect them from falling into temptations associated with their particular professions.

Jesus Christ himself denounced the kind of religious practice that was not matched by high moral and ethical standards in private and social life. A comprehensive discussion of these standards can be found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). They include a high level of truth and honesty in interpersonal and social relationships, a high sense of purity, modesty and humility, a profound sense of self sacrifice, a readiness to forgive as often as one is offended and a disposition towards peace and non-violence. He made his followers realise that not all who claim to be Christians (not all who say Lord, Lord) will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of the father in heaven. And the will of the Father in heaven is that they be perfect as the heavenly father himself is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Jesus devoted considerable attention to issues of social justice and leadership. He formulates a political principle for leadership that is oriented towards service when he told his disciples: "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mk 10:42-44). In the Sermon on the Mount, he condemned murder, adultery, false oaths and vengeance (Mt 5). And urged his followers to be "salt of the earth" (Mt. 5:13) and "light of the world" (Mt. 5:14). He called Matthew the Tax Collector to abandon the corruption of his profession and follow him and was able to lead Zaccheus, another Tax Collector, on the way to salvation through restitution to all those he had defrauded. Just as sin in the Old Testament is the breaking of the commandments of God leading

to the breaking of the covenant between God and his chosen people, so sin in the New Testament is the breaking of the one fundamental law of God, which is love. “I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (Jn. 13:34).

Jesus, in his teaching, addressed the economic manifestation of social injustice by targeting its root in human intentions – excessive preoccupation with personal security and the resulting avarice with regard to material goods. “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (Mt 6:24f).

Jesus warns those whose religiosity does not extend to the area of truth, honesty, justice and fair play, that he would denounce them on judgement day, if they do not immediately repent. He says, “When the day comes many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?' Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, all you evil doers!” Thus Christianity makes no room for crooks and fraudsters. It has no place for those who offer or receive bribe. It has no place for those who would lie and cheat. Genuine Christianity cannot accommodate much of what they call “the Nigerian factor” today. It has no place for those who would use ill-gotten wealth to manipulate the political process. Instead, all such corrupt practices are a negation of the Christian vocation to build here on earth a kingdom of justice, love and peace. Corruption in whatever guise it assumes breaks the covenant of love according to which we are to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves (cf. Lk. 10:27). Corruption is the breaking of the covenant of love that “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14).

The Responsibility of the Christian to Fight Corruption and Promote Integrity

To fight corruption and promote a culture of integrity in Nigeria, it is important to explore some of the root-causes of corruption and why it continues to persist even in a country with 50% of its population as Christians and where a greater majority of these Christians are very involved in their religion all year round – attending Church services each Sunday and a variety of devotional activities and programmes during the week. In exploring some of these root-causes and possible solutions, we shall look closely at (1) The Christian Leaders; (2) Christian Institutions; and (3) Christian Individuals, and survey the various ways we can contribute to stemming the tide of corruption in our country. By being more deliberate and intentional, we can all work together to transform our society for good.

First of all Christian leaders have an important role to play in setting the right example by their conduct and activities, by ensuring that their own leadership and administrative structures are established and run properly in line with the standards set by their constituted authorities, the expectations of their congregations, and even more importantly, in a manner consistent with godly values and virtues. Also, Christian leaders would be better able to influence their members if they invested more in educating themselves on how to become better, more ethical and more inspiring leaders and also by equipping themselves with the appropriate resources to guide their congregations to make better ethical choices. They would play their role better if they ensure that Church fund-raising activities are carried out in an ethical and God-fearing manner. This would require that Church leaders do not put too much financial pressure on their members, and that they constantly enhance their members' ability to avoid acts of corruption in their work and businesses. When Church leaders work hard to put in place structures that ensure transparency and accountability in the management of the Church's own financial resources, they will

send a very powerful signal to their members and inspire them to rise to higher levels of transparency, accountability and integrity in their own places of work and business. Finally, by developing and deepening their own spirituality and focusing their preaching, teaching and programmes more deliberately on fighting corruption, promoting social justice, the common-good imperative and integrity, Church leaders can inspire their communities to live more ethical lives.

Our religious institutions and structures will need to focus some more attention on fighting some of the underlying causes of corruption in our society. This will include striving to break some of the unholy bonds that still exist among Nigerians between the practice of Christianity and some ungodly beliefs and practices associated with our traditional African Religions, especially with regard to such rites of passage and social activities as funerals, weddings, child-naming ceremonies and fund-raising activities. The conduct of some of these activities runs contrary to Christian values and virtues, and often put undue financial pressure on individuals.

Christian institutions and communities must continue to resist the new religious ideologies and influences, including the excessive emphasis on the “prosperity gospel,” which appears to be promoting materialism, greed and crass individualism among Christian worshippers. Indeed the wave of destructive materialism via the “prosperity gospel” is quietly permeating the society, taking hold in some of our Christian communities, and threatening to supplant “the old time religion” handed down to us by the apostles.

Christian individuals themselves do contribute through their active and passive choices to engendering corruption in our society. Some Christians today have 'cheapened’ and are constantly abusing God's grace. The fear of the Lord does not restraint such Christians anymore. They often believe that they can “buy” God's graces and mercy, and will therefore indulge in acts of corruption, believing that they can always come back and

seek forgiveness and/or use the proceeds of their ill-gotten wealth to build Churches, donate at Church fund-raising events and therefore offer reparation for their intentional acts of corruption, only to return to such acts and perpetuate the evil cycle of the abuse of God's grace.

Pervasive corruption is largely driven by the lack of congruence between the beliefs that some of us Christians affirm in our devotional life and outward utterances, and the actual choices that we make on a day to day basis. As Christians, we are meant to be integral beings with our decisions and actions clearly linked to our espoused values and beliefs. The distinction between what some people have called “Church-mind” and the “Secular-mind” among Christians, is at the heart of this challenge. On Sundays, some Christians will listen to, speak about and exchange ideas on ethical behaviour and godly values, but will promptly and without hesitation be culpable in some “dirty deals” in their workplaces the next day.

These Christians are also not aware that by accepting that corruption is the norm and wilfully participating in it (telling themselves after all *“wetin man pickin go do”*), they are neck-deep in idolatry – trusting in human strength, human powers and corrupt acts to provide for their material needs, rather than trusting in the Almighty God to do so. Such people are involved in acts of corruption because they claim that they have no other choices – rather than explore the God-given talents and creativity that they have to overcome the temptation of corruption, find alternatives to corrupt practices and take a stand against corruption. They succumb, and fuel the new norm that one cannot make it in our society without being corrupt.

When a Christian is confronted with corruption, his reaction will be determined by what his understanding is of corruption. For Christians, the unchanging word of God provides the moral compass and the point of reference in thinking about and dealing with corruption. The Old Testament pays particular attention to the concept of corruption with accompanying examples of people from whom Christians can learn a great deal

when confronted with difficult situations. Even the New Testament provides some normative guidelines that believers can imbibe while living in a corrupt society. The Christian faith mandates Christians to live godly and morally upright lives.

The Old Testament presents us with a number of persons in positions of authority who acted so faithfully and honestly with money entrusted to them that no accounting was necessary (cf. 2 Kgs. 12:15; 2 Kgs. 22:7). The same testimony is given of Daniel: “The administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent” (Dan. 6:4). The faithfulness of Daniel to God caused him to be faithful in all areas of his life. Christians in public offices should be encouraged by the exemplary life of Daniel. A particularly striking example of Daniel's incorruptibility was how he used the Law of God to save an innocent and righteous woman Susanna, falsely accused of adultery and unjustly condemned to death by two wicked judges in Israel (cf. Dan. 13). Following Daniel's example, Christians are called to be loyal to God, conscientious, accountable and faithful citizens.

A position of power often entitles a person to enjoy certain rights and privileges. In this regard, it is interesting to examine the life of Nehemiah and how he demonstrated an alternative way of living (Neh. 5:14-19). He was appointed as governor in the land of Judah, but neither he nor his fellow workers ate the food allotted to the governor. The previous governors placed heavy burdens on the people to fund their extravagant lifestyles, but in the process impoverished the already struggling people even further. Out of reverence for God, Nehemiah did not follow suit. On the contrary, he helped others. For him, reverence for God did not only have to do with public worship, but it influenced his everyday life. He had compassion for others and showed generosity and thoughtfulness by feeding others from his own salary. In this way he avoided that money becomes his god.

The Bible puts a high premium on honesty, truthfulness, and integrity. These are the indices of just society. In the Old Testament, God instructed his people not to steal, not to lie and not to deceive one another, because “I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:1). The point is that human transgressions may escape the eyes of human jurisdiction, but God will assuredly punish the offender because nothing can escape his grasp. As such, God expects that integrity should be the mark of our words and actions. This will ensure trustworthy societies where no inspectors are necessary to check on people. As the Bible shows, greed is often at the root of corruption. King Solomon counters this attitude with the following Proverb: “Better a little with righteousness than much with injustice” (Prov. 16:8). For the Christian, the most valuable possession is not riches but right relationship with God. This is the problem with riches: “whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income” (Eccl. 5:10). What the Wisdom Books wish to make clear here is that money can never bring lasting satisfaction. The inordinate love of money will bring sorrow and disillusionment because wealth is always short-lived.

The Apostle John states that everything in the world, including the cravings of the sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the world's desires will pass away (cf. 1 Jn. 2:16-17). There is only eternal value if a person lives according to the will of God. In his Letter to the Galatians, St Paul refers to this kind of life as living by the spirit in contrast to living according to the sinful nature (Gal. 5:16-17). Bribery, corruption, greed, extortion, gratification, cheating, dishonesty, perversion of justice, covetousness and bearing false witness are all characteristic of the sinful nature. In fact, St Paul refers specifically to greed when he exhorts the Colossians to put everything that belongs to their earthly nature to death. He equates greed with idolatry, which is the worship of money (cf. Col. 3:5). There is no doubt that those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their sinful nature, live by the Spirit and are in step with the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:24-25). Christians should make every effort to align their lives with the Spirit, as the Spirit is the regulative principle for the believer's conduct.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul addresses the same matter (1 Tim. 6:6-10). He maintains that people who are content with what they have are happier than those who are never satisfied. The latter may fall into all kinds of sin as a result of their constant craving for more. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews calls Christians to keep their lives free from the love of money and be content with what they have, because God has promised that he will never leave nor forsake them (cf. Heb. 13:5). Thus Christians should be the first to fight materialism and greed, because they have the confidence that God will provide in all their needs. St. James' advice to the followers of Jesus Christ in a corrupt world is that they should rid themselves of all moral filth and evil and humbly accept the Word which is planted in them and which can save them (Jas. 1:21). The believer should strip off the pre-Christian sinful lifestyle and put on the new way of righteous living. Their lifestyle and behaviour will hence demonstrate their obedience to the word of God which is the new authority and guide in their lives. St Peter's admonition to believers is that they should have self-control and be alert. "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering" (1 Pt. 5:8-9). The apostle Peter gives more encouragement to the followers of Jesus Christ. He says: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Pt. 1:3-4).

It is true that the individual and social morality of a people is often determined by their religious beliefs and values. All true religions share in common transcendental values and elementary moral principles by which good is sought and evil is avoided. True Christianity promotes very high ethical and moral standards, which if believers try to live by, they will inherit Christ's kingdom of peace. No doubt, these ethical standards set before Christians will make for a more just, peaceful and wholesome

human society. True Christianity teaches people that the meaning of human life is beyond humanity, and beyond this world, therefore the proper dissemination of the Christian message will help to checkmate the human instinct to grab and to accumulate for self, while neglecting the common good. The preaching of the full message of Christ, which has the cross at its centre, is capable of purging Nigeria of the scourge of corruption. Indeed, the dissemination of authentic Christianity, not the message of convenience that we have become familiar with these days, is capable of transforming Nigeria into a corrupt-free nation.

Christians are called to be reformers who actively participate in the transformation of society. This action lies on two levels: a personal and a public level. Christians should guard against the temptation of corruption and live exemplary lives. On the public front, Christians should be willing to blow the whistle whenever corruption is encountered in society. The true transformation of society will come about when Christians make real effort to break away from the pattern of life in this sinful world and allow the Spirit of God to direct their lives. St Paul specifies what this entails when, writing to the Ephesians, he said “I say to you, then, and with insistence I advise you in the Lord: do not imitate the pagans who live an aimless kind of life. Their understanding is in darkness and they remain in ignorance because of their blind conscience, very far from the life of God. As a result of their corruption, they have abandoned themselves to sensuality and have eagerly given themselves to every kind of immorality. But it is not for this that you have followed Christ. For I suppose that you heard of him and received his teaching which is seen in Jesus himself. You must give up your former ways of living, the old self, whose deceitful desires bring self-destruction. Renew yourselves spiritually, from inside, and put on the new self, or self according to God, which is created in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:17-24).

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus makes it clear that “anyone who hears his words and acts accordingly is like a wise man, who built his house on rock. The rain poured, the rivers flooded, and

the wind blew and struck that house, but it did not collapse because it was built on rock” (Mt 7:24-26). We build our spiritual lives on solid rock, on solid foundation, when we build on the word of God. The word of God must take root in our lives and be the navigational compass of our daily Christian living: guiding our lives, shaping our actions, influencing our thoughts and ordering our decisions. The parable of the sower offers us a good example of what it means to allow the word of God to take root in our lives: we become fruit bearers (cf. Mt 13:1-23). According to Jesus, “A good tree always produces good fruit, a rotten tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit and a rotten tree cannot bear good fruit. Any tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire. So, by their fruits you shall know them” (Mt 7:17-20).

Authentic Christian Life is a Life of Integrity

Corruption is not just a crime by law; it is also an affront against God's commandments. The will of God is that his children should live holy lives, shunning evil and doing good. To combat this scourge of corruption, Christians have a duty to obediently observe God's commandments and to teach others to do so. This means making efforts to live lives of integrity. Many of our countrymen and women who engage in sharp practices would like to be seen as pious Christians. But in truth they are not. Christians who live corrupt lives cannot claim to know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of holiness and righteousness, who in Leviticus 19:2 says "Be holy for I the Lord am holy." They do not know the God of Moses and Joshua who on Mount Sinai presented the Ten Commandments as the terms of his contract with his people, insisting that fidelity to this ethical code is what will distinguish his people from all others.

Nigerians who claim to worship God, but who at the same time offer and take bribe, defraud, evade tax and circumvent just laws in numerous ways do not really know the God of Moses who in Exodus 22:8 says, "You will accept no bribes, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and is the cause of the ruin of the upright." They also do not know the God of the prophets who in Isaiah 33:15 says that the person who will be qualified to be in his presence is the one who "acts uprightly and speaks honestly, who scorns to get rich by extortion, who rejects bribes out of hand, who refuses to listen to plans involving bloodshed and shuts his eyes rather than countenance crime..." Nigerian worshippers who make a daily show of their religiosity must know that what the Lord truly requires of those who know him is (as we read in Micah 6:8) "to love tenderly, to do justice, and to walk humbly before your God." This is what it means to live a life of integrity.

Christian churches and institutions have a duty to practise and preach integrity and to provide ethical resources

that can help Christians, particularly in public life to live according to God's will and to give themselves generously to the service of their people. As the gathering of God's people, the Church has a social prophetic responsibility to shine the light of God's truth to the society. The first Psalm blesses the one who "finds delight in the law of the Lord and meditates day and night on his commandments" (Ps 1:2). Aside heralding and meditating on the word of God, a Christian should also read, believe, teach and practise the word of God. Psalm 119:105 put these qualities in perspective, when it says, "Your word is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path. I have sworn and have made up my mind to obey your decrees." In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus makes it clear that "anyone who hears his words and acts accordingly is like a wise man, who built his house on rock. The rain poured, the rivers flooded, and the wind blew and struck that house, but it did not collapse because it was built on rock" (Mt 7:24-26). We build our spiritual lives on solid rock, on solid foundation, when we build on the word of God.

The word of God must take root in our lives, and be the navigational compass of our daily Christian living: guiding our lives, shaping our actions, influencing our thoughts and ordering our decisions. The parable of the sower offers us a good example of what it means to allow the word of God to take root in our lives: we become fruit bearers (cf. Mt 13:1-23). According to Jesus, "A good tree always produces good fruit, a rotten tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit and a rotten tree cannot bear good fruit. Any tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire. So, by their fruits you shall know them" (Mt 7:17-20). Christianity is a religion of fruit bearing. If we do not bear fruit, then we become like the fig tree that is no good. We will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

As Christians, there is so much we can do to change things in the society. We often tend to underestimate our capacities for positive change. Each one of us is called to be a force of good in the communities in which we live. No Christian should say, "There is nothing I can do" or "I am just one person in the crowd, no one will notice me." In his Letter to the Ephesians,

St Paul says: "This may be a wicked age, your lives should redeem it" (Eph. 5:16). The Apostle Paul made this statement at a time when Christians were succumbing to the pressures of a corrupt and decadent society. In other words, Christians in today's Nigeria can maintain a high level of moral and spiritual sanity in such a perverse society without allowing secular influences to contaminate their faith. It is still possible to live in Nigeria today and not get oneself polluted by the mess of corruption and other vices. With God, all things are possible.

The exhortation of St Paul to the Ephesians offers a fitting thought to conclude this reflection: "I say to you, then, and with insistence I advise you in the Lord: do not imitate the pagans who live an aimless kind of life. Their understanding is in darkness and they remain in ignorance because of their blind conscience, very far from the life of God. As a result of their corruption, they have abandoned themselves to sensuality and have eagerly given themselves to every kind of immorality. But it is not for this that you have followed Christ. For I suppose that you heard of him and received his teaching which is seen in Jesus himself. You must give up your former ways of living, the old self, whose deceitful desires bring self-destruction. Renew yourselves spiritually, from inside, and put on the new self, or self according to God, which is created in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, give up lying; let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin: do not let your anger last until the end of the day, lest you give the devil a foothold. Let the one who used to steal, steal no more, but busy himself working usefully with his hands so that he may have something to share with the needy. Do not let even one bad word come from your mouth, but only good words that will encourage when necessary and be helpful to those who hear. Do not sadden the Holy Spirit of God which you were marked with. It will be your distinctive mark on the day of salvation. Do away with all quarrelling, rage, anger, insults and every kind of malice; be good and understanding, mutually forgiving one another as God forgave you in Christ. As most beloved children of God, strive to imitate him" (Eph. 4:17-5:1).

The members of the Church are God's agents for the positive transformation of society. Society will be a better place when Christians live according to the prescriptions of their faith in exercising the demands of their public roles. As Jesus said to his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.... Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:13-16).

Conclusion:

We need an Ethical Revolution in the Form of Value Re–Orientation

There is the (indispensable) role of religious leaders, religious institutions and religious people in the required ethical revolution or value re-orientation of the Nigerian people. Christians in our society must be made to see the hypocrisy in religious practices that have little or no bearing on the social morality of the people. Christians must be made to understand that the ultimate goal of all our ritual and devotional practices should be the attainment of a “godly” life, a life of truth, justice and integrity, a life devoid of sin and corruption. This assertion is amply supported by the teachings of the Prophets, the Teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ himself, the teachings of the early Apostles, and the teachings of Christian leaders across the centuries. It could be said with all confidence therefore that corrupt practices have no place among Christians, and among authentic practitioners of any religion for that matter.

It is imperative that we use our Religious Institutions, Networks, and Resources, including Scriptures and the moral teachings that are found in the Bible and in other sacred texts of our religion to condemn corrupt practices and cultivate the culture of integrity in our society. We can begin from the premise that our religion unequivocally condemns acts of corruption and exhort a life of integrity. We can then showcase religious persons that have been models of virtue and exemplars of the highest standards of social morality, personal integrity and accountability through the course of history.

Religious bodies can introduce oath taking and integrity pledges for their members - a public commitment by the members to conduct their affairs with the highest standards of integrity. Such oath taking should especially apply to members that are newly appointed to senior management positions in both public and

private enterprises, and also those appointed to offices in religious institutions.

Religious leaders must consider seriously integrating elements of social morality in our regular sermons and teachings, if they have not been doing so already. This should also apply to youth leaders and leaders of women's groups who do some teaching or give short exhortations whenever they are gathered for their religious functions. The Catholic Church has a well-developed social morality contained in what we know as "the Social Teachings of the Church." We must search for similar bodies of teachings in other Christian traditions.

Apart from the ongoing general training of all members of our Churches on the evil of corruption, and on the imperative of a life of integrity, it is necessary to arrange regular enlightenment programmes for the following agents of socialisation and segments of society that belong to our Churches, preferably by holding separate workshops for the following categories:

- a) Parents and children
- b) Teachers and students
- c) Politicians, leaders of socio-cultural groups, youths
- d) Senior staff of public institutions
- e) Management staff of private corporations, including Banks
- f) Staff of the various security agencies, including the Police
- g) All categories of workers

There is a need for major outreach programmes for value re-orientation specially directed at Christian Journalists, Correspondents, Artistes, Directors, Editors and Producers in the Traditional and New Media, including Film Producers, Advertising Practitioners, Bloggers, Twitters, and other Social Media celebrities. These people can be very influential in forming the minds and consciences of our young people.

Finally, we call for the institution of a regime of sanctions and rewards in Churches and other Christian institutions, such as will promote integrity and discourage acts of corruption in a society where many people want to be seen as good, “born again,” pious or dedicated Christians. We shall put this in the form of a series of questions for Christian individuals, Christian Churches and Christian communities to reflect upon and act accordingly:

- a. Are our Churches and religious communities able to sanction in any way those of our members found to have either corruptly enriched themselves, cut corners or otherwise violated laid down procedures?
- b. What systems can we put in place as Church communities and institutions to reward, honour and in some cases immortalise members of our Church communities who are exceptional models in a life of integrity and accountability?
- c. Can our Church communities and institutions put in place mechanisms (and resources) to support members that suffer persecution, losses or hardship on account trying to live godly lives of integrity or on account of their anti-corruption stand?
- d. Can our Church communities and institutions provide avenues for testimonies regarding significant (inspiring) experiences related to the fight against corruption and the life of integrity?
- e. Can Christian leaders be more circumspect (and interrogate critically beforehand where possible), testimonies about God's favours or “financial miracles,” which only end up promoting materialism, and the desire for instant gratification among the members of the congregation?

APPENDIX

A Glossary of Corrupt Practices Condemned in the Bible

Several acts of corruption are directly mentioned and condemned in the Bible. This is because such behaviours are contrary to the life that God desires for his children. In the entire Judeo Christian tradition, all manifestations of corruption are an affront on the dignity of the human person and a violation of his or her covenant relationship with the God of righteousness. The following biblical references are simply a sampling of the numerous texts in both the Old and New Testament which condemn a multiplicity of corrupt behaviours:

Authority, abuse of: The Hebrew word *mashal* and the Greek word *exousia* translated as “authority” means “to rule”, “to govern” and “to exercise dominion”. Authority is meant to be exercised for the good of the people. In the book of Nehemiah, those invested with authority to govern misused it and for this they prayed God for pardon (Neh 9:33-37). Jesus, who was given authority over all things in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18), taught with authority (Matt 7:29; Lk 4:32). He had authority to forgive sins (Matt 9:6; Mk 2:10) and exercised his authority over unclean spirits and diseases (Mk 1:27; Mk 3:15) that the people marvelled that such authority had been given to men (Matt 9:8; Mk 1:22; Lk 4:36). He gave this same authority to his disciples (Matt 10:1; Mk 6:7; Lk 9:1). But the Jewish leaders often questioned the authority of Jesus (Matt 21:23; Mk 11:28) and even accused him of acting contrary to the State (Lk 20:20). But on his part Jesus demonstrates that the Jewish leaders abused their authority by lording it over the people they govern. He admonished his disciples not to act like them. (Lk 22:25).

Bribery: From the Hebrew word *shochad* meaning gift, present or bribe. The Greek often translate this Hebrew word as *doron* or *dora* which simply means gift. But gifts given or received to

subvert justice or show partiality (Ex 23:8; 1Sam 8:3; Deut 10:17; 16:19; 2Chr 19:7; Prov 17:23; Mic 3:11) especially against the innocent and the vulnerable (Ps 15:5; Is 1:23; 5:23) clearly refer to bribes. The governor Felix expected Paul to give a bribe so as to judge in his favour and when he did not receive anything from Paul, he left him in prison for two years (Acts 24:25-27). The consequence of bribery is a curse (Deut 27:5; Job 15:34).

Cheating: the Hebrew word “to cheat” is closely connected with the word “to deceive”. In Gen 31:7 and Exo 8: 25 the word *talal* is used with the meaning “to cheat” and “to deceive”. In Gen 31:7 Jacob narrates how his father-in-law, Laban, deceived or cheated on him just as the pharaoh cheated on Moses by not allowing the people of Israel to depart the land of Egypt after he had promised. In Mal 1:14 the word used is *nokel*, which means, “to act cleverly, cunningly, deceitfully”. The person who has a “male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices what is blemished to the Lord” is a cheat and is cursed.

Coercion/force: the use of force to acquire or get something from someone is described with the word *gazal*, (“to tear away”, “plunder”, or “take away by force” Gen 31:31). This is one of the corrupt acts condemned in the law (Lev 5:21, 23; 19:13). It is particularly wrong to take away anything by coercion from the poor because the Lord will plead their cause (Prov 22:22-23; cf. Eccl 5:7; Isa 10:2) and punish such (Eze 18:18) because he is always concerned about the plight of the poor.

Corruption: *shachath*, translated as “corrupt” could also mean “to ruin”, “to spoil” or “to act ruinously”. In Gen 6:11-12, God decided to destroy the earth he had created because the people were corrupt, in other words, they had ruined his work and acted contrary to the very reason for creating the world. In acting contrary to the covenant or commandments of God, the people corrupted themselves (Exo 32:7). Thus, corruption includes any act that is tantamount to turning away from God like idolatry whereby one values man-made things more than the love of God (Deut 9:12; 31:29; 32:5; Isa 1:4; Ps 14:1). For corrupting themselves, the people of Israel will be punished (Hos 9:9).

The Greek word *phthora*, in the New Testament, which means “ruin, destruction, dissolution”, is figuratively related to moral decay and often translated as “corruption”. St. Paul says, “For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:8). He exhorts, “Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts,” (Eph 4:22) so as not to be corrupted as the devil deceived Eve (2Cor 11:3). St. Peter prays too that the divine power of God may help us escape the corruption that is in the world (2Pet 1:3-4) so that we do not remain slaves of corruption (2Pet 2:19), which is often perpetuated by false teachers and false prophets in the community (cf. 1Tim 6:5). To avoid being corrupt, one must flee from evil company (1Cor 15:33) for nothing unclean shall inherit the kingdom of heaven (Rev 21:27).

Covetousness: the word *chamad* used in Exo 20:17 means “desire and try to acquire” or “to desire passionately” or “to find pleasure in” or simply “to covet”. The ninth and tenth commandments both condemn covetousness. To covet another's material things or spouse is an offence against the commandments of God. An example of this is found in the story of Ahab who was not contented with his wealth but desired the little portion of land Naboth inherited from his family (1Kgs 21:1-10). *Pleonexia*, the Greek word translated as “covetousness”, also means to take “advantage” of someone or “a greedy desire to have more”. St. Peter warns that covetous people could easily exploit by their words (2Pet 2:3), hence the need to beware of them.

Deceit: *'aqob* the word which comes from the root *ya'aqob* “to deceive” (the name of Jacob) with the meaning “deceitful”, “tough” or “crafty” occurs only in Jer 17:9 with this nuance. The use of the same word in Isa 40:4 has the meaning of “uneven bumpy ground”. But the word *mirmah*, which is “deceit or treachery” first used in Jacob's deceitful stealing of his brother's (Esau) blessings, occurs in many other instances. “The Lord abhors the man of blood and deceit” (Ps 5:6). Prayer made from deceitful lips are likely to be unanswered (Ps 17:1) and only the

man who is free of deceit can ascend to the mountain of the Lord (Ps 24:4). The one who desires life and wants to enjoy good things ought to keep his lips from speaking deceit (Ps 34:14; cf. Ps 36:4; 50:19; 52:6; 109:2) and also keep away from the counsel of the wicked for they are deceitful (Prov 12:5, 20; cf. Jer 5:27). Deceitful people shall be punished for they do not know God (Jer 9:5-9) and are cursed, as they will not enjoy the full length of their lives (Ps 55:23). The Greek for *mirmah* (deceit) is *dolos*. Jesus in the New Testament considers this as one of the evils that proceed from the heart of men (Mk 7:22). Jesus, on whose lips there was found no deceit (1 Pet 2:22), is able to x-ray the heart for deceit as in the case of Nathaniel (Jn 1:47).

Dishonesty: '*betsa*' is the OT word translated as "dishonest". It means "unjust gain", "gain made by violence" or "illicit profit". The sons of Samuel in his old age practiced dishonesty, which compared the people to ask for a king (1 Sam 8:3-5). The Psalmist prays God; "incline my heart to your warning signs and not to dishonest gain" (Ps 119:36) because he who hates dishonesty will have long life (Prov 28:16) and such will dwell on the heights (Isa 33:15). Jesus ironically praised the dishonest steward in the gospel for his shrewdness (Lk 16:8) but remarks that dishonesty in little things shows the level of unfaithfulness when one is entrusted with greater goods (Lk 16:10-12).

Egoism/accumulation: to have many possessions, often described by the Hebrew word *rabah*, is considered a blessing (Gen 15:1; 17:2; 22:17; 26:14; 1Kgs 3:13). However to accumulate to the detriment of other people is what the Lord abhors. Therefore, the king, whom the Lord was to appoint over the people, would be one who will not accumulate wives and properties at the expense of his people (Deut 17:17). One can notice that Solomon's heart went away from the Lord when he accumulated so much, both of women and of properties (cf. 1Kgs 11:1-6). Jesus in the gospel calls the rich man fool, for placing his trust on his wealth and because of that demand was made of his soul the very night (Lk 12:16-20).

Embezzlement – the verb *nosphizomai* which means “to keep back, misappropriate, steal or embezzle” is used in Acts 5:2 to describe the action of Ananias and Sapphira, who sold a piece of land and kept part of the money for themselves rather than declare the exact amount. Embezzlement is a corrupt act condemned also in Lev 27:28 as anything already devoted to the Lord cannot be used for personal interest. In other words, whatever is set apart for a purpose must be dedicated and used specifically for that purpose.

Exaction – to exact means to make an unfair demand or obtain payment by force. The prophet Amos condemns exaction (*nagas*) especially from the poor (Amos 5:11). The Law also stays on the side of the poor on the sabbatical year, where creditors are not to exact from both the poor and the foreigners (Deut 15:2-3; cf. Neh 10:31).

Extortion: the Hebrew word *osheq* refers to oppression or extortion. This means taking something violently or forcefully from a person (Lev 5:23; Eze 22:29). Those who do this have forgotten God (Eze 22:12). Extortion attracts a curse (Eze 18:18). The Greek of the Old Testament translates *osheq* with different words: either with *adikema* which may refer to “violation of a standard of uprightness”, “injustice” or simply “wrongdoing” or *thlibo* which means, “to oppress” or *adikia* which means “unrighteousness”. The best example of extortion in the NT is found in Lk 3:14 where the Greek verb *diaseo* used means “to shake violently” or “to extort money from someone by violence, harassment or intimidation”.

Falsification: – the word *chalaph*, which could mean “to alter”, “to change” or “to substitute”, describes altering or substituting a good thing for a bad or vice versa. The Law condemns such act (cf. Lev 27:10). A clear example in the NT is the story of the servant who falsified figures to his advantage because he was going to be relieved of his duty (Cf. Lk 16: 1-9). Although Jesus praised him for his astuteness, his wrong action was not exonerated.

Flattery: the Hebrew word translated as flattery is from the root *chalaq* which could mean “to divide, share, plunder, allot, apportion, assign” or “to be smooth, slippery” or “to flatter”. It may be to smoothen one's personality or allot to oneself what one is not. Thus, the wicked “flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out or hated” (Ps 36:2). The flattery lips speak with deception (Ps 12:2) but such the Lord detests and will cut off (Ps 12:3).

Fraud: the same word, *tok*, translated as “fraud” could also refer to deceit. Thus, there is a thin line between both actions of fraud and deceit. It is also closely related to oppression since the same word could express this notion as well. The Psalmist complains that fraud and deceit are in the midst of the wicked (Ps 55:12). St. James accuses the rich of defrauding the labourers by withholding their wages (Jam 5:4).

Greed: in Hebrew, '*batsa*' means “gain by unrighteous violence”, “covetous” or “greedy”. “The greedy man for gain curses and spurns the Lord” (Ps 10:3) and “he who is greedy makes trouble for his own house” (Prov 15:27). The prophet Jeremiah speaks about the greed of the people including the prophets and the priests (Jer 6:13). The story of Gehazi, Elisha's slave, who went after Naaman to collect gifts from him, which the prophet Elisha had turned down, is a clear example of a greedy person (2Kgs 5:21-26). The Greek word, *pleonektes*, expresses the same meaning. St. Paul exhorts his Corinthian community to separate themselves from greedy people (1Cor 5:11) because such will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (1Cor 6:10) for they are “accursed” (2Pet 2:14).

Hoarding – the Hebrew word *chasan* which means “to be stored up, treasured up or laid up” is also translated as “to hoard”. The Lord's desire is that what is stored up is shared among his people (Isa 23:18). Those who engage in hoarding will definitely end up badly (Bar 3:17) and leave their wealth to others. Jesus tells the parable of the man who laid up so much for himself but whose soul was demanded of him the same night (Lk 12:16-21). Jesus therefore admonishes us not to lay up treasures on earth “where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal” (Matt 6:19).

Hypocrisy: *hupokrisis* in Greek means “pretence”, “dissimulation”, “outward show” or “duplicity”, hence hypocrisy. “The hypocrite lay up anger in the heart” (Job 36:13). Ben Sirach admonishes: “Be not a hypocrite in men's sight” (Sir 1:29) for they stumble at the law (Sir 32:15). Jesus accuses the Jewish leaders often of putting up outward show while they are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness inside (Matt 23:28; cf. Matt 6:2, 5, 16; 15:7), pointing out the wrong of others without noticing theirs (Matt 7:5). Jesus notices their hypocrisy in trying to catch him out about paying taxes to Caesar (Mk 12:15; cf. Matt 22:18). Thus, he warns his followers of the “leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Lk 12:1). Paul accuses Peter of hypocrisy when he withdraws from eating with the Gentiles because of the presence of some Jews who had arrived the Christian community in Antioch (Gal 2:11-14). And Peter himself exhorts his listeners to put away all hypocrisy and instead “long for the pure spiritual milk” (1 Pet 2:1).

Inequality/discrimination: God acts and judges with *meysar*, that is, “equity”, “evenness”, “uprightness” and “straightness” towards all (Ps 9:8; cf. Ps 17:10; 75:3; 96:10). God requires such also from his people since he has established equity in the land (Ps 99:4). God desires that the king who seeks wisdom possesses this attribute, for equity comes with divine wisdom (cf. Prov 2:9).

Injustice or Unjust judgment: the Hebrew word *'evel* or *'avel* is translated as injustice or unrighteousness. The Lord requires that everyone be given fair judgment and treated with equal dignity, whether poor or rich (Lev 19:15). In the same way, there should be no injustice in weights and quantities (Lev 19:35). Injustice is an abomination to God (Deut 25:16) because he is righteous and there is no injustice in him (Deut 32:4). The prophets lashed out against unjust laws and judges (Is 10:1-2; Amos 5:7, 15). He who sows injustice will reap sorrow (Prov 22:8). The opposite of injustice is *mishpat* (justice). It is by justice that a king gives stability to the land (Prov 29:4).

Love of money: the Greek word *philarguria* is translated in English as “love of money”(cf. 1 Tim 6:10). *Philarguria* is a greedy disposition, love of money or avarice. St. Paul in admonishing Timothy underlined this as one of the vices that must not be seen in a bishop. Consequently, the bishop must be an *aphilarguros* (free from the love of money; 1Tim 3:3). Love of money is one of the signs of the last days as Paul tells Timothy (2Tim 3:2).

Lying: the Hebrew words for lying, *sheqer*, means “deception”, “disappointment”, “falsehood” and *kazab* means “a lie” “falsehood” or “a deceptive thing”. “Do not bear false witness against your neighbour” (Exo 20:16; Lev 19:11), the eighth Commandment, emphasizes giving justice especially to the innocent and the just person (Exo 23:7). The one who bears false witness should not go unpunished (Deut 19:18; Ps 5:6; Prov 19:5, 9; Isa 28:17; Jer 13:25-26; Mic 6:12-13). The wicked conceives evil and brings forth lies (Ps 7:15) and they love falsehood more than speaking the truth (Ps 52:5; cf. Ps 62:4). The righteous person hates every form of falsehood (Ps 119:128, 163; Prov 13:5) and prays God to deliver him/her always from deceitful tongue (Ps 120:2; 144:8, 11) and false witness (Prov 12:17; cf. Prov 14:5). The Lord hates falsehood with a passion (Prov 6:17, 19; cf. Jer 7:4-9; Zech 8:17) but delights in the righteous (Prov 11:18; 12:22).

Nepotism/partiality: The Hebrew word *nakar*, “to recognize”, “acknowledge”, “respect”, which is translated in its negated form as “partiality” discriminates by showing respect or honour to someone at the expense of another. The Law condemns this out rightly (Deut 16:19). No one is to be partial in the administration of justice for judgment is God's (Deut 1:17; cf. Prov 24:23). The rich are not to be favoured over the poor (Lev 19:15; cf. Prov 28:21). The Greek word, *prosopolempsia*, translated as “partiality”, “favouritism” or “prejudice” is even stronger. God is no respecter of persons that is, he is never partial (Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9)

Oppression: the laws against oppression were very strong and no wonder different words are used to express this phenomenon. The words used include *Lachats* (to press, squeeze or oppress), *ashaq* (to oppress, wrong, extort) and *yanah* (to oppress, suppress, wrong, treat violently, maltreat, vex). No one is to oppress a stranger or foreigner as the people of Israel are made to remember that they too were once strangers in the land of Egypt (Exo 22:21; 23:9; Deut 23:16). Neither are they to oppress their neighbours (Lev 19:13) or even the hired servant, who is poor and needy (Deut 24:14). The condemnation of the action of David against Uriah is a clear example of an oppressive action (cf. 2Sam 12:1-12). Jesus' mission includes setting the oppressed free (Lk 4:18).

Sex for favour: Many people today both in public offices and institutions of learning demand sex in order to grant some favour. To lie with someone either to extort or grant favour is condemned by the scriptures. Potiphar's wife mounted pressure on Joseph to *shakab* (lie) with her. Joseph's refusal landed him in prison (Gen 39:7-20). The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were punished for their sins of promiscuity that became extremely obvious when they demanded to *shakab* with the men who had come to Lot's house (Gen 19:4).

Stealing: "do not steal" is the seventh of the Ten Commandments given to Moses (Exo 20:15; Deut 5:19). The word *ganab*, "to steal" or "to rob" could also mean, "to deceive" when one deliberately hides something or information from the knowledge of another who should know as in the case of Jacob and Laban (Gen 31:20, 26). Jesus underscores that stealing as part of the Ten Commandments, is a necessary evil that all his followers must avoid (Mk 10:19). This is further demonstrated in chasing out those who were turning his Father's house into a den of robbers (Matt 21:12-13). St. Paul on his part holds strongly that those who teach others not to steal must not steal themselves (Rom 2:21) and encourages the thief to desist from such, take up some work so as to be able to share the proceeds with the needy (Eph 4:28).

Tribalism: arises when there is discrimination in allocating just resources to different tribes that make up the nation. Among the people of Israel, their tribal affiliations were very strong and there were laws that protected the rights of the various tribes. Although the land was to be divided by lot, the inheritance was to be shared according to the size of the tribes (Num 26:54-56). The rights to family inheritance was also protected within the tribes: “You shall inherit the land by lot according to your families; to a large tribe you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a small inheritance; wherever the lot falls to any man, that shall be his; according to the tribes of your fathers you shall inherit. (Num. 33:54)”

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