

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

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Abstract

Corruption in Nigeria enjoys an unraveled fame whose knowledge, one neither requires the dexterity of a herald nor an excruciating probe of the intellect to decipher; its ubiquity is phenomenal in all respects. It lies beneath the façade of complexus of vagaries of social cum political problems confronting the nation. It is a malaise that wears the toga of an enigma that defies a definite description, yet intimate in all fronts. Several attempts from divergent perspectives have been made to quell the issue of corruption in Nigeria. This work another attempt at seeing how the issue of corruption provides a socio-cultural context for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy proclaimed by the Holy Father, Pope Francis I on 11th April 2015. Being a year of mercy, this piece calls on the corrupt to look at the poor with mercy as the tyrannical greed of the corrupt shatters the plans of the weak and tramples upon the poorest of the poor.

Keywords: Corruption, Nigeria, Socio-Cultural, Context, Extraordinary Jubilee, Mercy

Introduction

Corruption is a highly complex and diverse phenomenon with many different manifestations. It can be grand or petty, incidental, systematic or systemic. It can be judicial, administrative, legislative or political in nature. It can occur in the public, private or civil society sector. It can involve groups or individuals. Academics from various disciplines (including lawyers, historians, moralists, economists and political scientists) and international organization experts define it in various ways. There is no room for a comprehensive discussion of definitions of corruption. However, some of the more well-known ways in which corruption has been defined, include: "the giving, offering, or agreeing to give a benefit to an

official or agent and the receiving, obtaining or agreeing to receive or attempting to obtain a benefit by a public official or agent";ⁱ "the violation of formal rules governing the allocation of public resources by officials in response to offers of financial gain or political support";ⁱⁱ "the abuse of public roles or resources for private benefit";ⁱⁱⁱ "the abuse of power, most often for personal gain or for the benefit of a group to which one owed one's allegiance. While the term 'corruption' is most often applied to abuse of public power by politicians or civil servants, it describes a pattern of behaviour that can be found in virtually every sphere of life";^{iv} "a symptom of something gone wrong in the management of the state where institutions designed to govern the relationships between citizens and the state are used instead for the personal enrichment of public officials and the provision of benefits to the corrupt"^v. From the above definitions, corruption appears to be more than bribery (to which it is often reduced in legal definitions), and relates to various forms of mismanagement, abuse or misuse of mainly public authority, office, duties, trust or resources, for private, personal or sectoral interest, benefit or gain. While this helps an understanding of the meaning of corruption, the primary concern of this work is to see how corruption provides a socio-cultural context for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy proclaimed by the Holy Father, Pope Francis I on 11th April 2015.

Corruption in Nigeria

If there is any social malaise whose notoriety hardly can be paralleled, and which bears an ignoble identity with the geographical construction otherwise known as Nigeria, then one rarely needs a deep search to discover that which is our point of departure- corruption. Corruption enjoys an unraveled fame whose knowledge, one neither requires the dexterity of a herald nor an excruciating probe of the intellect to decipher; its ubiquity is phenomenal in all respects. It lies beneath the façade of *complexus* of vagaries of social cum political problems confronting the nation. It is a malaise that wears the toga of an enigma that defies a definite description, yet intimate in all fronts^{vi}. The damages it has done to the nation are astronomical. It leads to slow movement of files in offices, police extortion and slow traffics on the highways, port congestion, queues at passport offices and gas stations, ghost workers syndrome, election irregularities, among others. Even the mad people on the street recognize the havoc caused by corruption - the funds allocated for their welfare disappear into the thin air. Hence, it is believed by many in the society that corruption is the bane of Nigeria^{vii}.

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

Corruption in Africa has led to the collection of debt by Nigeria that now stare their citizens to pay back, and most of these debts were collected for contracts that were never completed or done at all. Ours is a country that has lost two vital and veritable tools of good governance: stability and credibility so cheaply to *megalomania*^{xi} and *kleptomania*^{xii}. We are trapped in a tangle web of callous leaders who are champions of administrative tactical indiscipline, dissipations and plundering. They wear corruption and matchless mischief like a signet ring to demonstrate to the rest of the world that they are quite shameless in their brash polity and harsh principles that put everything on the continent in dare strata with the attendant recipe for disaster^{xiii}.

As a consequence of corruption, Nigeria suffers a shocking humiliation as a country. She faces international ostracism. Both the guilty and the innocent are paying for it, following everyone like a snail to its shell, and making sure nothing good comes your way. Nigeria, the giant and pride of Africa, has been crippled by corruption. In terms of education corruption has made Nigeria glide precariously. Endless strikes by teachers whose salaries are not paid for many months and involvement in sinister activities by students who are subjected to very harsh neglect have turned most institutions of learning into dens of potential criminals. Most certificates issued by learning institutions in Nigeria provoke doubt wherever they are presented. Most of our graduates who go abroad to further their education are subjected to another examination to prove that they are truly graduates^{xiv}.

There is an unparalleled rate of unemployment and retrenchment. The faces of greater percentage of Nigerians register destitution, frustration and despair. Politically, the turmoil, the repression and the general insecurity that has pervaded Nigeria has forced thousands of Nigerians young and old to flout all international

border laws to get out of the country by hook or crook^{xv}. If you have tried to go to the American Embassy, you would see the huge number of Nigerians struggling to leave the country as though they were given an ultimatum. Consequently, the image of Nigeria has suddenly slumped into infamy^{xvi} and can be compared to the unfortunate wayfarer who fell into the hands of brigands along Jerusalem-Jericho road. Nigeria is a country where countless human beings, men and women, children and young people, are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandoned and in need of mercy^{xvii}.

A Resume of Misericordia Vultus

Mercy is a mystery that is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace- revealing the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity^{xviii}. Our salvation depends on it. The Holy Father, Pope Francis I proclaimed the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy so that the Church may gaze even more attentively on mercy so that she may become a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives. It is also a special time for the Church when her witness might grow stronger and more effective^{xix}. The Jubilee year opens on 8 December 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception^{xx}. The reason being that it recalls God's redemptive action of mercy from the very beginning of the history of mankind. After the sin of Adam and Eve, God did not wish to leave humanity alone in the throes of evil. So he turned his gaze to Mary, holy and immaculate in love (cf. Eph 1:4), choosing her to be the Mother of man's Redeemer. When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. The Roman Pontiff writes, "I have chosen the date of 8 December because of its rich meaning in the recent history of the Church. In fact, I will open the Holy Door on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive."^{xxi} This is based on the teachings of his predecessors and the vision of Vatican II. Saint John XXIII, at the opening Vatican Council II, indicated the path to follow: "Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up arms of severity."^{xxii} The Jubilee Year would end on 20th November 2016, the Solemnity of Christ the King. "On that day, as we seal the Holy Door, we shall be filled, above all, with a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity for having granted us an extraordinary time of grace"^{xxiii}.

Expounding on the implications of the theological content of the Year of Mercy, the Holy Father taught that this year is a key that indicates God's action towards us. In the Sacred Scripture, God does not limit himself merely to affirming his love,

but makes it visible and tangible. Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviours that are shown in daily living. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us^{xxiv}. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. This is at the heart of the Church's mission: her credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. "Mercy is the foundation of the Church's life. All her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her tenderness to the world can be lacking in mercy"^{xxv}.

To resound the message of mercy, Pope Francis drew attention to the great teaching of John Paul II's encyclical *Dives in Misericordia (Rich in Mercy)*. He drew attention to two passages: First, Saint John Paul II highlighted the fact that we had forgotten the theme of mercy in today's cultural milieu: "The present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy."^{xxvi} Furthermore, Saint John Paul II pushed for a more urgent proclamation and witness to mercy in the contemporary world: "It is dictated by love for man, for all that is human and which, according to the intuitions of many of our contemporaries, is threatened by an immense danger. The mystery of Christ ... obliges me to proclaim mercy as God's merciful love, revealed in that same mystery of Christ. It likewise obliges me to have recourse to that mercy and to beg for it at this difficult, critical phase of the history of the Church and of the world."^{xxvii} The church is therefore called upon to be a servant of mercy and to mediate it to all peoples.

The Vicar of Christ places the practice of pilgrimage at the heart of the Year of Mercy. The act of pilgrimage to the Holy Door of Mercy in Rome and other parts of the world requires pilgrimage, which further teaches believers that mercy requires dedication and sacrifice^{xxviii}. He further expresses his burning desire that during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. "It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his

preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead”^{xxix}.

The document also teaches that the season of Lent during this Jubilee Year is to be lived more intensely, with emphasis on the Sacrament of Reconciliation: “The season of Lent during this Jubilee Year should also be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy. How many pages of Sacred Scripture are appropriate for meditation during the weeks of Lent to help us rediscover the merciful face of the Father!”^{xxx}. focusing more intensely on the sacrament of reconciliation, the Roman Pontiff writes: “Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the centre once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God's mercy with their own hands. For every penitent, it will be a source of true interior peace”^{xxxi}. In a very practical way, Pope Francis will send out Missionaries of Mercy during Lent of this Holy Year, who will be a sign of the Church's maternal solicitude for the People of God, enabling them to enter the profound richness of this mystery so fundamental to the faith. Added to this is that the jubilee year entails the granting of indulgences^{xxxii}.

With this, it is hoped that the message of mercy would reach everyone especially for those involved in criminal organizations and in corruption. He writes, “May the message of mercy reach everyone, and may no one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy. I direct this invitation to conversion even more fervently to those whose behaviour distances them from the grace of God. I particularly have in mind men and women belonging to criminal organizations of any kind. For their own good, I beg them to change their lives”^{xxxiii}. Extending the invitation further, he writes: “The same invitation is extended to those who either perpetrate or participate in corruption. This festering wound is a grave sin that cries out to heaven for vengeance, because it threatens the very foundations of personal and social life. Corruption prevents us from looking to the future with hope, because its tyrannical greed shatters the plans of the weak and tramples upon the poorest of the poor”^{xxxiv}.

The Pope takes the practice of mercy beyond the walls of the church to include other peoples: Muslims and Christians. He writes: "There is an aspect of mercy that goes beyond the confines of the Church. It relates us to Judaism and Islam, both of which consider mercy to be one of God's most important attributes. ... I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with these religions and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination"^{xxxv}.

Towards the end of the bull, Pope Francis turns to Mary, Mother of Mercy: "My thoughts now turn to the Mother of Mercy. May the sweetness of her countenance watch over us in this Holy Year, so that all of us may rediscover the joy of God's tenderness. No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh. The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of his love"^{xxxvi}. After Mary as the Mother of Mercy, Pope extends his thoughts to the saints and blessed ones who have made divine mercy their mission in life. In this regard, he singles out St. Faustina: "Our prayer also extends to the saints and blessed ones who made divine mercy their mission in life. I am especially thinking of the great apostle of mercy, Saint Faustina Kowalska. May she, who was called to enter the depths of divine mercy, intercede for us and obtain for us the grace of living and walking always according to the mercy of God and with an unwavering trust in his love"^{xxxvii}. He ended the Bull by asking us to open our hearts to God who can surprise us on the path of mercy^{xxxviii}.

Misericordia Vultus and Corruption in Nigeria

A cursory glance at our history reveals that Nigeria's history is one of corruption. This is more than 50 years after independence (1960) and there is nothing substantial to show for it as more than half of our people are still living in poverty. The Roman Pontiff in this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy sees it as an opportunity to extend an invitation to those who perpetrate corruption to conversion, a change of heart; a time to allow their hearts to be touched by the plight of the poor. It is a time when the corrupt must have mercy on the poor who have been crushed by their wrongdoing. "This is the opportune moment to change our lives! This is the time to allow our hearts to be touched! When confronted with evil deeds, even in

the face of serious crimes, it is the time to listen to the cry of innocent people who are deprived of their property, their dignity, their feelings, and even their very lives”^{xxxix}. The Roman Pontiff writes that, “May the message of mercy reach everyone, and may no one be indifferent to the call to receive mercy. I direct this invitation to conversion even to those whose behavior distances them from God”^{xl}. Two groups of people are here involved: those “men and women belonging to criminal organizations of any kind”^{xli} and those “who either perpetrate or participate in corruption”^{xlii}. The necessity of conversion is based on the consequences of corruption on both the perpetrator and the victims, the poor: “its tyrannical greed shatters the plans of the weak and tramples upon the poorest of the poor”^{xliii}. He calls corruption “This festering wound... a sinful hardening of the heart that replaces God with the illusion that money is a form of power... It is a work of darkness fed by suspicion and intrigue”^{xliv}, which “is a grave sin that cries out to heaven for vengeance, because it threatens the very foundation of personal and social life”^{xlvi}. The consequences of remaining in corruption is delusion and sadness: “To stick to the way of evil ill only leave one deluded and sad. True life is something entirely different”^{xlvi}.

Conclusion

Corruption is existent in most governments, and it is not peculiar to any continent, region and ethnic group. It cuts across faiths, religious denominations and political systems and affects both young and old, man and woman alike. Corruption is found in *democratic* and *dictatorial* politics; *feudal*, *capitalist* and *socialist* economies. *Christian*, *Muslim*, *Hindu*, and *Buddhist* cultures are equally bedeviled by corruption. Corrupt practices did not begin today; the history is as old as mankind. Ancient civilizations have traces of widespread illegality and corruption. Thus, corruption has been ubiquitous in complex societies from ancient *Egypt*, *Israel*, *Rome*, and *Greece* down to the present^{xlvi}. This does not, however, mean that the magnitude of corruption is equal in every society. Some countries are more corrupt than others! As *George Orwell* notes in his widely read book, *Animal Farm*: “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others”^{xlvi}; therefore, corruption is not peculiar to Nigeria, however, it is tolerated more in Nigeria. The current work has attempted to bring the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy to bear on the Nigerian problem of corruption.

Endnotes

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^{viii} Efeturi Ojakaminor, *Nigeria's Ghana Must Go Republic: Happenings*. (Ogun: Ambassador Publications, n.d.), P. 418

^{ix} Shehu Shagari, *The Nigerian Standard*, November 1, 1983, p. 11.

^x Zainab Musa, "Inside IBB's Palatial Minna Hiltop Mansion", *Weekly Trust*, Sat, Oct 20, 2007. p. 40.

^{xi} A mental illness characterized by delusion of grandeur and a lust for power

^{xii} An uncontrolled impulse to steal.

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^{xxii} Pope Francis I, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, *Misericordia Vultus*. No. 4. p.7

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^{xxvi} Pope John Paul II, Rich in Mercy, *Dives in Misericordia*, no. 15

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