

Corruption In Nigerian Society & The Insouciance Of The Church In The Light Of Micah 3:9-12

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Abstract

This paper is a critical discourse on the seeming silence of the Church about the issue of Corruption in Nigerian Society, using Micah 3: 9-12 as a case study. It aimed at finding out the relevance of Prophet Micah's message to the contemporary Nigerian church and society in the light of the claim that Religion is necessary for morality, vis-à-vis the seeming damaging conclusion that many religious activities these days no longer impede corruption. The analyses employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. Data gathered both from the primary and secondary sources were analyzed through the hermeneutical, descriptive and analytical methods. The findings of the paper are that there is a high level of corruption in Nigerian Society and the Church is silent or saying little and that Corruption, in whatever name it is called, including its encouragement by insouciance, can affect the society in many ways. The paper is of the view that the church, like Micah in his time, cannot remain silent or seen to be promoting what it ought to condemn. The paper concludes that The Nigerian Political elites should be constantly reminded of such passages as Micah 6:8 where we are told that what the Lord truly requires of those who know him is "to love tenderly, to do justice, and to walk humbly before your God." And that Religious leaders and organizations should be reminded that they can help turn many Nigerians away from what appears to be an incredibly high sense of devotion to the cult of material prosperity and material success towards the spiritual values of truth, justice, holiness and purity.

Keywords: Corruption, Church, Insouciance, Nigeria, Micah 3:9-12

Introduction

Many have had cause to question the deepening corruption and decay in government despite the outward display of religious devotion by public officials and their visitations to ministers of God (Itebiye, 2015). The answer

could be located in one burgeoning pastoral elite that has, knowingly or unknowingly, entered into an unholy alliance with the political elite to steal the commonwealth and live a life of affluence and showmanship. This development has impacted negatively on the Society and the Church, unfortunately, in many critical ways (Oshodi, 2012).

This paper is concern on why the term “*bribery and corruption*” is hardly heard of from most pulpits or elaborated upon by many modern clerics, especially in the new generation “*mega*” churches though so persistent and massive in Nigerian society. Why has the Church become so silent about bribery and corruption?

Corruption

Corruption has been described as the worst form of dishonesty (Itebiye, 2015). And dishonesty (Hebrew = עֲקָמוּת) refers to a “*lack of honesty or integrity*” or a “*disposition to defraud or deceive*” (Hornby, 2010: 419). It is closely linked, in Biblical terms to immoral beliefs (Hebrew = אֵל יִרְסוּם) which refers to beliefs that are immoral because they have the tendency to cause harm or the fact that they involve unjustified moral judgments. This class of beliefs includes attitude that do not even have any moral content. They are immoral because holding them constitutes an immoral condition of the belief-holder. This usually involves a moral failure of the belief-holder and such beliefs are highly objectionable (Kant, 1996).

Dishonesty or lying has always been morally wrong, but it is true to say that all humans are born with intrinsic worth called human dignity. This dignity derives from the fact that humans are uniquely rational agents, “*capable of freely making their own decisions, setting their own goals, and guiding their conduct by reason*” (Kant,1996: 117).

Dishonesty is morally wrong for two reasons. First, it corrupts the most important quality of the individual’s humanity and our ability to make free, rational choices. Every dishonest behaviour contradicts the part of us that gives the human his or her moral worth (Baron, 1988). Secondly, dishonesty robs others of their freedom to choose rationally. When our dishonest behaviour leads people to decide other than they would, had they known the truth, we have harmed their human dignity and autonomy (Levy, 2004). It is, therefore, believed that to value ourselves and others as ends instead of means, suggest that we have perfect duties to avoid damaging, interfering with, or misusing the ability to make free decisions (Baron, 1988)

Researchers have proved that many animals engage in deception, or deliberately misleading another, but only humans are wired to deceive both themselves and others (Levy, 2004). Lazar (1999) explains that People are so engaged in managing how others perceive them that they are often unable to separate truth from fiction in their own minds.

For instance, Pears (1984) writes about Feldman's experiment, in which two strangers were placed in a room together and videotaped while they conversed. Later, independently, each was asked to view the tape and identify anything they had said that was not entirely accurate. Rather than defining what counts as a lie and to avoid the moral tone of the word "lie," Feldman's experimenters simply asked subjects after the fact to identify anything they had said in the video that was not entirely accurate. Initially, each subject said, he was entirely accurate. Upon watching themselves on video, subjects were genuinely surprised to discover they had said something inaccurate. The lies ranged from pretending to like someone they actually disliked to falsely claiming to be the star of a rock band. The study found that 60 percent of people had lied at least once during the 10-minute conversation, saying an average of 2.92 inaccurate things. In other words, 60 percent of a group of persons, on the average, act dishonestly to another. But the fact is, dishonest action is not an innate habit but acquired routine. And God hate lies (Prov. 6:17).

Corruption in Nigeria and Insouciance of the Church

Corruption has remained a persistent phenomenon in Nigeria since the creation of modern Public Administration in the country (Olumeyan, 2005). There have been cases of official misuse of funds and resources (Oshodi, 2012). Some Scholars are of the view that the rise of public administration and the discovery of oil and natural gas are two major events that have led to the increase in corrupt practices in the country (Onoiribhorlo, 2006). In the 2014 result on corruption ranking, Nigeria was ranked 136 out of 174 surveyed countries (Transparency International, 2014). The result shows that there was improvement in the corrupt state of the country, compare to the previous years, though still high. Mathematically, the report showed that Nigeria was the 38th most corrupt country in the world in 2014 and scored 28% in the Confidence Interval (C.I.). By comparison, countries like Denmark and New Zealand scored 91% each. What that implies is that Nigeria failed when it comes to transparency in the country. That this report was highly celebrated in the Government circles shows how bad the situation is. In all sincerity, a student that celebrates a 28% score needs his/her head examined (Itebiye, 2015).

Agbakwuru & Erunke (2015), highlighted some scandalous corruption cases or "*probes*" that were carried out by the Senate between 2011 and 2015. Curiously, the reports of the probes never saw the light of the day and as Agbakwuru & Erunke (2015) rightly posit, the Nigerian National Assembly investigations are mostly self-serving, while the probes are mainly avenues to intimidate, cajole, coax as well as to extort money from recalcitrant and unwilling government agencies or persons that refuse to play

ball. In others words, it is all about how to create rooms for more corruption. Indeed, as Achebe (2012: 25) observes, reading about Nigerian society is like “*reading from the scroll of Hades that stimulates nothing but frustration, emotional torture and self pity*”.

Meanwhile, the living condition of most Nigerians, according to the 2014 World Banks Social Indicator of Development, remains far below poverty line. It is an irony that the biggest oil exporter in Africa, with the largest natural gas reserves in the continent and enormously large reserves of human and natural resources, is still being categorized as poor. The country has significant potential to build a prosperous economy characterized by rapid economic growth that can significantly reduce poverty, inequality and improve standards of living of the population through better access to and quality of health care, education and infrastructure services. But Nigeria is still a society that is generally characterized by insufficiency of the basic life sustaining amenities (Bello, 2016). The quotation accredited to the late Nigerian politician, chief M.K.O. Abiola, that “*on the face of nearly every Nigerian..., there are bold expressions of despondency, deprivation and disillusionment*” still remain true 20 years after (Okoye, 2000 :2).

This, not unexpectedly, leads to the extreme drive for material wealth, class-consciousness based on the inequalities of distribution of wealth, and anomie arising from the total relegation of societal values in the desperate pursuit of individual goals. Majority of the people live in poorly developed rural areas where the basic amenities of life - pipe borne water, electricity, passable roads, etc – hardly exist. The “*well-to-do*” people in the country are made up of less than five percent of the population (Okoye, 2000: 5), while the rest are poor, deprived, wretched, illiterate, diseased, hungry, gullible, and at various levels of frustration. Less than twenty-five percent of the employable adults have jobs, the remaining over seventy-five percent are either completely unemployed or under employed - like graduate-commercial-motor-cyclists (Dangora, 2005).

But, the worst part is the role the Church and some of her leaders have chosen to play. It ranges from absolute silence (insouciance) in the face of the depravity, wantonness, impunity and licentious decadence (see no wrong and do no wrong mentality) on one hand; and on the other hand, what Bello (2016) refers to as shepherding, that only take pleasure in visiting government houses, being allies and associates to top Government officials and politicians, worshipping on the altar of benefits and sponsorship system, and encouraging theft from public till by requesting for and accepting hefty donations from public officials.

A sampled opinion of about 250 Nigerians of varied age, educational background and profession revealed that Nigerians, generally do not trust their elites and seems to be losing confidence in their religious leaders as

well. Ironically, they do not agree that Nigerians are generally corrupt. See table below.

S/N	QUESTIONS	YES	NO	INDIFFERENCE
1.	Corruption is high in Nigeria	75%	15%	10%
2.	Politicians and top civil servants are generally corrupt	80%	10%	10%
3.	High level of corruption is the main reason for poverty	72%	25%	3%
4.	Churches and other religious bodies are not doing enough to help with corruption	65%	23%	12%
5.	Some churches and other religious bodies benefit from corruption through tithes, thanks offerings and donations	75%	20%	5%
6.	Church and other religious bodies can help curb corruption through constant preaching against it	58%	32%	10%
7.	Nigerians are generally corrupt	15%	70%	15%

The above sampled opinion reveals three basic facts on what most Nigerians feel about the issue of corruption in the country:

- 1.) Nigerians are aware of the endemic nature of corruption in the country and the colossal damage it has done, and is still doing, to the people and the society.
- 2.) The elite who make so much noise about the issue are actually the perpetrators of the heinous crime. For example, virtually every High Public Office holder becomes a multi-millionaire becomes an instant millionaire. Most retired High Public Office holders (including those in the Military/Paramilitary) are big time business owners. Whereas the Nigerian average worker retires into homelessness and poverty.
- 3.) The sample also proves that the Church and other religious bodies are not just silent or saying little inconsistently, but have been identified to be partners, directly or indirectly, in the unholy act.

The Prophet Micah

Micah, whose name means *who is like YAHWEH* (Strong, 1995), was a prophet who prophesied from approximately 737–696 BC in Judah and was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah, Amos and Hosea. Micah was from Moresheth-Gath, in southwest Judah (Schetelich, 2013). According to Simundson (1994), he prophesied during the reigns of kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah. Micah's messages were directed chiefly toward Jerusalem. He fearlessly prophesied the future destruction of Jerusalem and Samaria (Bruce, 1986), the destruction and then future restoration of the

Judean state (Bright, 1967), and rebuked the people of Judah for dishonesty and idolatry (Heschel, 1962).

Mic 3:9-12:

“⁹Hear this, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; ¹⁰ who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. ¹¹ Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they look for the LORD’s support and say, “Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.” ¹² Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets. (NIV)

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was once quoted to have said that if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor (Mathis, 2003). The prophet Micah certainly agrees with this as the passage quoted above presents strong evidence supporting that claim.

Micah 3:9-12 can be better appreciated when we include verses 5-8 which is actually the sections of the passage that contains the harsh indictment against the prophets, while the verses 9-12 can be treated as the second section of the passage that contains the broader denunciation of the actions of the rulers, priests, and prophets who have oppressed the innocent.

According to Mathis (2003), three influential classes in the kingdom of Judah are specially referred to in this passage (Mic. 3:9-12). They are:

1. *The princes; i.e.* the ruling class, the judges and magistrates, these are functions usually exercised by members of the royal family or the elites (See Jer. 21:11, 12).
2. *The priests; i.e.* members of the Jewish priesthood, taking part in the services of the temple, and also in teaching the people the ways of God.
3. *The prophets; i.e.* not the men who were specially inspired of God, like Micah, but men who claimed to possess a desire to work for God, who were trained in the schools of the prophets, and who became a very numerous class in the land, and took an important part in the education of the community.

In these three classes we have comprehended the most influential men in the land; men who, by virtue of their position, ought to have exerted the wisest and most salutary influence upon the people. But instead of this, the very opposite was actually the case. They who should have been *"the salt of the earth"* became *"like salt which had lost its saltiness."* (Matt. 5:13). The Princes, instead of righteously administering the Law, sought their own enrichment. They accepted bribes (*"The heads thereof judge for reward,"* verse 11), and they utterly sacrificed the rights and interests of the people. *"They built up Zion with blood"* (verse 10), *i.e.* they reared their luxurious palaces and increased their own store of wealth by perverting equity, and by

unrighteous decisions; under the expressive figure of cannibalism, the seer describes the effect of their rapacity (verses 2, 3).

The prophets also were utterly mercenary (Bright, 1967). If the bribe was only given, they prophesied as desired. "They caused the people to err, biting with their teeth (*i.e.* feeding upon the bribe) and crying, Peace" (verse 5); but only let the bribe be withheld, and they altered their tone and became the heralds of evil tidings (verse 5). Nor were the priests behind in cherishing the same spirit. "*The priests teach for hire*" (verse 11). The support of the Jewish priesthood was provided for by special divine arrangement. The tenth in Israel was apportioned to the sons of Levi as their inheritance (See Num. 18: 20; Deut. 18:2). But though thus provided for, such was their greed that, "*producing the answer of God upon the receipt of money, they sold the grace of the Lord for a covetous price*" (Mathis, 2003:76).

Following his judgment against other prophets, Micah turns the conversation to validate the message he has just delivered (verse 8). He squares his own words in the biblical tradition. After affirming himself, Micah turns once again with a clarion call that expresses outrage not only at prophets, but also rulers, priests, Prophets and every area of society (verse 9). Rulers are ruling for bribes; priests are teaching for a fee, and prophets are performing their duty for money. While they claim to do these duties in the name of the Lord (verse 11), Micah believes otherwise. Their statements "*Surely the Lord is with us,*" are merely pious ways of avoiding Micah's harsh words to them. They use part of their religious heritage in a perverse way to avoid accountability and to reject the words of one of God's true prophets. But, they can't get away with this. Micah declares the whole of Jerusalem is perverted because of their poor leadership, and punishment is coming to everyone by way of God.

According to Simundson (1994), Not only does Micah speak out against these prophets, but he also declares punishment. Night will set. Darkness will be more prominent than light, and the prophets who have "*led God's people astray*" will stop hearing from the Lord. They will experience shame and their lips will be silenced. Broadly speaking, it is impossible for them to get away with falsehood. Consequences exist for their actions, and punishment will happen (verse 7).

Furthermore, Micah's voice, when heard through the predicament of Jerusalem, its leaders, and its people, shows that not all suffering is punishment for sin. Sometimes suffering is a consequence of abuse by the wicked and powerful (Simundson, 1994). Any analysis of a cultural system where suffering occurs should be examined in totality: from the top - down as well as from the bottom - up.

Finally, this passage illustrates that Ministers of God's Gospel must not only speak against injustice but should always do so appropriately to the

situation, the people, and their place in life. It is clear that some in leadership were abusing their power and doing so in the name of the Lord. Their timing, their message, and the situations to which they were speaking were misguided, indirect, and therefore damaging. But, wise and discerning prophets like Micah, have the option to take another path: to speak against wrong, but to do so by bringing the right message at the right time.

Micah's message for Nigerian

Corruption, in whatever name it is called, including its encouragement by insouciance, according to Quigley (2003), therefore, can affect the society in the following 4 ways:

1. **It saps the foundations of equity.** These rulers understood the Law, but being so thoroughly possessed by the mercenary spirit, they failed to administer it righteously—were partial in their decisions, favouring those who offered the most tempting bribe, and thus caused the legal administration in the land to become rotten and corrupt.
2. **It leads to oppression and cruelty.** (Micah 3:10; see also Micah 3:2,3) The one concern of the princes was to enrich themselves and to find themselves surrounded with all luxuries and splendours; and hence they cared not to what lengths of extortion and fraud and oppression they went, or what suffering might be involved, if only they could compass this end.
3. **It renders its subject unfaithful in the discharge of the most sacred trusts.** No trust can be more sacred than that committed to the man who is constituted a teacher of spiritual truth, and upon whom it devolves to direct men in the ways of righteousness and godliness; but here (Micah 3:11) we have such catching the spirit of covetousness, and, as the result, proving altogether faithless to God and to the consciences of men, prophesying "peace" to those who bribed them, and "war" to those who withheld the mercenary gift.
4. **It excites the spirit of godless 'self-confidence' and 'self-sufficiency'.** These leaders of the people, while acting indifference with the truth, yet finding their ill-gotten gains increasing in their hands, boasted that evil could not reach them (Micah 3:11). This is a true picture of the un-ruling behaviours of Nigerian Politicians.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Political elites should be constantly reminded of such passages as Micah 6:8 where we are told that what the Lord truly requires of those who know him is "*to love tenderly, to do justice, and to walk humbly before your God.*"

Religious leaders and organizations can help turn many Nigerians away from what appears to be an incredibly high sense of devotion to the cult of material prosperity and material success towards the spiritual values of truth, justice, holiness and purity. Christian leaders and groups can use the

message of the cross to promote a modest and an austere lifestyle that will contradict the crass materialism and extreme economic liberalism of our age which is responsible for the worsening plight of the poor in our country and elsewhere. Muslims can do the same with the notion of sacrifice which is a key element of the three Abrahamic religions.

This nation needs religious leaders and groups of austere disposition who would spearhead a moral revolution and an ethical re-orientation for a nation and its people that have been brought low in the course of a protracted midnight of debauchery.

Recommendations:

1. Sound doctrine should be at the forefront of all religious teachings. In this age of delusion and deception, when many Christians and other religions followers no longer know what to believe or why they should believe, only the teaching of the Biblical sound doctrines (the Truth) can help revive our worship and religious life style, and by implication, the Nation.
2. The religious community in Nigeria needs to be re-educated on the relevance of a true worship, which must be that which bears the imprint of hallowed nature in its fullness and sees the ultimate goal purely in a personal day-to-day relationship with God. A righteous life style, rather than keeping a sinner comfortable in sin, is a heavenly help for the sinner to get out of sinful condition, religiosity that sees nothing wrong with corruption is a condition that makes peaceful life impossible. Sin is a mountain between a man and God, and must be taken away. The sense of guilt, which naturally follows sin, lies heavy on the heart, and must be removed. Unpardoned sin can murder peace. Every true Christian should know that his peace arises from a realization of his sin being forgiven, and his guilt being put away.
3. Religious and worship places in Nigeria should stop celebrating money and affluence and go back to honouring virtues, just and righteous characters. This will bring about spiritual healing, and enhance man's relationship with God. With such relationship, the worshipper can claim with the apostle, I "*have peace with God*" (Romans 5:1, NKJV). This peace with God is a calm, intelligent sense of friendship with the Lord of heaven and earth. He that has it feels no barrier and separation between himself and his Holy Maker. He can think of himself as under the eye of an all-seeing Being, and therefore not feel afraid. He can believe that this all-seeing God beholds him, and not displeased. Such a man can see death waiting for him, yet not be greatly moved. He can go down into the cold

river-close his eyes on all he has on earth-launch forth into a world unknown, and take up his abode in the silent grave, yet feel peace.

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