Corruptive Tendency and the Problems of Evil in Contemporary Nigerian Society: A Theological and Ethical Perspective

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of the problem of evil and corruption in Nigeria. This phenomenon of evil, a central theme in moral and philosophical discourse, takes on a uniquely urgent dimension in the context of systematic corruption in Nigeria. This paper examines how corruption, as a pervasive societal evil, undermines justice, equality, social justice, and human flourishing in Nigeria. This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical design, utilising oral accounts, critical literature review, empirical case studies, and observational methods. It draws on philosophical theories such as Saint Augustine's theodicy and Hannah Arendt's concept of the banality of evil to understand the nature and consequences of corruption in Nigeria. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the problem of evil in the context of corruption in Nigeria. The research reveals corruption as a structural evil, and attempts to fight this cankerworm require more than laws and policies; hence, an appraisal of theological and ethical perspectives, ethical reorientation, institutional reforms, and spiritual renewal are required to confront evil in both its visible and invisible forms.

Methodology

Qualitative descriptive-analytical design using oral accounts, literature review, and case studies

Key Framework

Augustine's theodicy and Arendt's concept of the banality of evil applied to Nigerian corruption

Main Finding

Corruption as a structural evil requiring theological, ethical, and institutional responses

Keywords: Nigeria, society, corruption, evil, theological perspectives

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of corruption in Nigeria has transcended mere political analysis; it has become a metaphysical and ethical conundrum, demanding philosophical reflection (Okere, 2018). If Nigeria yearns for justice, development, and virtue, why then does corruption persist with such stubborn resilience? This question no doubt mirrors the classical "problem of evil" in philosophical parlance (Hick, 1966). In the Nigerian context, we might similarly ask: if the ideals of democracy, justice, and development are universally affirmed, why does the corruptive tendency thrive in both individual behaviour and institutional frameworks?

This paper examines the pervasive issue of corruption in contemporary Nigeria through the philosophical lens of moral evil. It argues that corruption should not be viewed merely as a legal infraction or political dysfunction, but as a deeply rooted moral failure that reflects the same human capacity for evil discussed in classical philosophical and theological thought (Arendt, 1963; Augustine, 426 AD/1990). Drawing parallels with the problem of evil, particularly the idea that moral evil stems from the misuse of human free will (Augustine, 426 AD/1990), the work highlights how corruption in Nigeria is systemic, normalised, and spiritually corrosive (Adetula, 2020; Transparency International, 2023).

01

Philosophical Foundation

Corruption as moral evil, paralleling the classical problem of evil in philosophical discourse and human free will misuse.

02

Systemic Analysis

Examination of how corruption becomes normalised and spiritually corrosive within Nigerian institutional frameworks.

03

Holistic Solution

Addressing corruption through ethical renewal, cultural introspection, and the reawakening of civic and communal virtue beyond institutional reform.

In doing so, it seeks to show that addressing corruption requires more than institutional reform; it demands ethical and theological renewal, cultural introspection, and a reawakening of civic and communal virtue (Elias, 2015).

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS
Corruption

A widely used contemporary definition of corruption is the abuse of public office for private gain. A World Bank perspective underscores that public office may be abused through bribery, nepotism, embezzlement, and abuse of discretion, undermining governance and public trust, as highlighted in its 2017 World Development Report on Governance and the Law. This means that public office is abused when an official accepts, solicits, or extorts a bribe. Furthermore, this abuse extends to when a private agent gives or offers a bribe to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit.

World Bank. (2017). World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law. World Bank. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0950-7

In simple terms, corruption occurs when people in power misuse their positions for selfish purposes. It involves breaking the rules of honesty and fairness to gain personal benefits. According to Transparency International (n.d.), corruption is "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain." In Nigeria, this problem appears in many forms, including bribery, embezzlement of public funds, favouritism in government contracts, and the general neglect of civic duties by officials and citizens alike.

Forms of Corruption

- Bribery and extortion
- Embezzlement of public funds
- Nepotism and **favouritism**
- Abuse of discretionary power

Philosophical Dimension

- Failure of character and virtue
- Contradicts African philosophical ideals
- Betrayal of community values
- Disrupts moral and communal harmony

From a philosophical point of view, corruption is more than just bad behaviour. It is a failure of character; a lack of virtue. Aristotle taught that good societies are built on virtuous citizens who practise justice, honesty, and self-control (as cited in Irwin, 1999). When these virtues are abandoned, as evident in Nigeria's pervasive corruption, society frays, manifesting as a moral cankerworm gnawing at the nation's ethical foundation.

The Problem of Evil

The problem of evil is a major moral question that requires theological consideration. It asks how a good, all-powerful, and all-knowing God can allow evil to exist in the world. If God is willing to stop evil but cannot, then He is not all-powerful. If He can stop evil but chooses not to, then He is not all-good. If He is both willing and able, then why does evil still exist? This challenge is often linked to the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (as cited in Kenny, 1979).

Many thinkers have responded to this question. Augustine of Hippo, an early Christian philosopher, argued that evil is not a thing in itself, but the absence of good (Augustine, 1991). He believed that God created everything good, but evil came into the world when humans misused their free will (Augustine, 1955). So, moral evils like stealing, lying, and violence happen because people choose to do wrong, not because God causes them.

Later, the philosopher Leibniz offered a **defence** by arguing that this is "the best of all possible worlds" (Leibniz, 1985). In his view, even though evil exists, the world has just the right balance of good and evil to allow humans to have free will and grow in virtue. But not everyone agreed. The writer Voltaire mocked this idea, especially after a devastating earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 (Voltaire, 2005).

David Hume, a Scottish philosopher, also questioned whether God's goodness and power made sense in a world full of suffering. He argued that the amount of evil we see makes it hard to believe in a perfect God (Hume, 1980).

Today, the problem of evil is still discussed by philosophers and theologians. In a country like Nigeria, where corruption, injustice, and suffering are widespread, it raises important questions not just about God, but also about human nature and the failure of society.

THE CORRUPTIVE TENDENCY IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY

By "corruptive tendency," we refer to the persistent inclination within individuals, institutions, and systems to engage in corrupt acts, a phenomenon deeply embedded in Nigeria's political, economic, and social fabric. In the Nigerian context, corruption transcends sporadic infractions; it is systemic. Historical abuses include the estimated more than $4 billion stolen by General Sani Abacha during the 1990s. Significant portions of these funds have since been recovered, with the U.S. Department of Justice facilitating the repatriation of approximately $480 million in 2014 and an additional $311 million in 2020 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014; U.S. Department of Justice, 2020).

24/100

Corruption Index 2022

Nigeria scored 24 out of 100, ranking 150th out of 180 countries

67%

Police Bribery

Of Nigerians seeking police help reported paying bribes

$74B

Fuel Subsidy Costs

Total subsidy payments between 2005 and 2020 (₦13.7 trillion)

According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, Nigeria scored 24 out of 100 in 2022, ranking 150th out of 180 countries, with only marginal improvements to 25 in 2023 (145th) and 26 in 2024 (140th) (Transparency International, 2022, 2023, 2024). Economically, corruption has been evident in the fuel subsidy regime, where investigations estimate approximately $450 million in losses from fraud between 2006 and 2012 (Bawa, 2205), whilst the overall subsidy payments between 2005 and 2020 totalled a staggering ₦13.7 trillion (approx. $74 billion) (NEITI, 2025).

At the social level, everyday corruption–informally known as "dash"–is pervasive: 67% of Nigerians seeking police help reported paying bribes, 56% when getting government documents, 53% to avoid police trouble, and 26% at medical facilities; only 10% believed one could report corruption without risk (Afrobarometer, 2024; Daily Post, 2025).

This kind of entrenched corruption reflects what philosophers call moral evil, the kind of evil that results from the conscious and voluntary actions of moral agents. Just as moral evil stems from human choices that violate ethical norms, corruptive behaviour arises from deliberate actions that undermine justice, fairness, and the common good. In this sense, corruption is not just a legal or economic problem; it is a moral and existential one. From a philosophical perspective, this tendency shows a breakdown in virtue and a distortion of the moral will. Thinkers like Immanuel Kant argue that human beings can act from duty and moral law (Kant, 1998). When individuals choose personal gain over moral responsibility, they misuse their freedom and undermine the moral order of society. In Nigeria, the corruptive tendency is often reinforced by weak institutions, lack of accountability, and cultural attitudes that tolerate or even admire those who succeed through dishonest means (Ekeh, 1975).

Therefore, the corruptive tendency can be likened to the problem of evil, not in a supernatural sense, but as a human-centred crisis that calls into question the moral structure of society. It challenges not only governance and justice, but also the ethical character of the nation itself.

CORRUPTION AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Corruption as Moral Evil

Corruption, like moral evil, arises from the misuse of human free will. According to St. Augustine's privation theory, evil is not a substance of its own but the absence or distortion of good (*privatio boni*) (Augustine, 398-400/1998). This means that evil actions occur when individuals fail to live up to the good they are meant to embody. In the Nigerian context, corruption reflects this principle: it is not just the presence of wrongdoing, but the failure of public servants to act with integrity and responsibility. When a government official embezzles funds meant for education or healthcare, it is a moral act of harm–a deliberate wrongdoing that parallels the concept of moral evil in ethics (Wikipedia, "Moral evil," n.d.). In moral-theological terms, such misappropriation constitutes indirect theft (peculation)–a grave violation even if the stolen funds are later returned (Maritain, §2. Theft). Furthermore, corruption is seen as a moral decay of public duty, undermining justice, solidarity, and the common good–thus qualifying as a deliberate evil act in theological ethics (St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology, "Justice and Corruption"; Kammer & Massaro, 2021).

Expanding on Augustine, it is crucial to distinguish between individual moral failings and systemic institutional corruption. At the individual level, *privatio boni* manifests as a direct, voluntary choice by an agent to act against the good–e.g., an official accepting a bribe. This is personal corruption, a deliberate moral failing. However, systemic institutional corruption represents a deeper, structural privation of good. Here, the very mechanisms, laws, and cultural norms within an institution are themselves distorted or lack the inherent good (justice, accountability, transparency) they ought to possess. In this sense, *privatio boni* applies differently: individual corruption is a choice to withhold good, while systemic corruption is an environment where good is systemically absent or suppressed, making individual moral failings not just possible, but often incentivised. Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defence, while traditionally applied to divine permission of evil, can be recontextualised here: even if individuals possess free will, a corrupt system can severely limit the meaningful exercise of that will towards good, making it extraordinarily difficult for even well-intentioned individuals to avoid complicity or become agents of change (Plantinga, 1974).

Addressing Counterarguments: Corruption, Agency, and Systemic Evil

Corruption, unlike traditional theological or natural evil, unequivocally stems from direct human choices and actions, not divine will or impersonal forces. However, this distinction does not invalidate the analogy. Systemic corruption creates conditions mirroring the effects of natural evil: critical infrastructure collapse or healthcare failure due to embezzled funds causes suffering–loss of life, poverty, and despair–which is as indiscriminate and devastating as a natural disaster. In such scenarios, aggregated individual corrupt acts create a "horrendous evil" (Adams, 1999), profoundly negating human meaning and value, akin to severe natural catastrophes.

The "problem of suffering" further validates this analogy. Just as theologians question God's permission of suffering, citizens in corrupt societies ask why a legitimate state tolerates widespread harm. This shifts focus from divine to institutional accountability, yet the ethical quandary persists. The cumulative effect of individual corruption, enabled by systemic weaknesses, creates suffering so vast it transcends individual transgression, becoming a deep societal malady.

Political Theodicy and the Question of Justification

Theodicy, in moral philosophy, justifies a good God despite evil (Adams, 1999; Swinburne, 1998). Similarly, a political theodicy questions whether a state remains legitimate when it perpetuates or tolerates systemic corruption. Just as theologians reconcile God's goodness with suffering, political philosophers must ask: Can a government consistently failing in social justice still be seen as morally legitimate?

Augustine's Privation Theory

Evil as absence or distortion of good. Corruption represents a failure to embody intended virtue and integrity in public service, both individually and systemically.

Political Theodicy

Questions the legitimacy of governmental authority when systemic corruption persists. This parallels the theological problem of reconciling divine goodness with evil.

Hiddenness of Good

Honest actors become invisible in public narratives, creating moral despair and weakening collective resolve for change.

The Hiddenness of Good

The "hiddenness of God" (Schellenberg, 1993) describes divine absence in the face of suffering. Similarly, pervasive corruption in Nigeria obscures existing good. Honest civil servants, principled politicians, and courageous activists, though working daily for reform, remain largely invisible in public narratives. This invisibility fuels cynicism, leading citizens to perceive universal corruption and immutability. This moral despair, akin to religious abandonment, is dangerous, discouraging action and weakening collective resolve.

Philosophical Theories and Corruption

Augustine's View: Evil as a Lack of Good

According to St Augustine, evil is a privation of good (*privatio boni*) rather than a substance or power (Augustine, 398-400/1998a). Applied to corruption, a dishonest public official is a twisting of public service, not a new destructive force. The corrupt individual fails in virtue, perverting a role meant for justice and order into a tool of selfishness and harm.

Augustine's concept distinguishes individual from institutional corruption. Individually, *privatio boni* is a direct, voluntary choice against good, such as an official accepting a bribe. Institutionally, it signifies a deeper, structural privation where mechanisms, laws, and cultural norms are distorted or lack inherent good (justice, accountability, transparency). Institutions, originally intended for public welfare, are perverted, normalising practices like nepotism and clientelism, transforming structures meant to uphold justice into vehicles of exploitation. Thus, individual corruption is a choice to withhold good, while systemic corruption is an environment where good is systemically absent or suppressed, incentivising moral failings. This structural perversion links to Augustine's original sin, suggesting inherited corrupt systems predispose individuals to wrongdoing within such frameworks (Augustine, 398-400/1998a, Book 7, Chapter 12).

Addressing Philosophical Objections

A primary distinction between corruption and traditional theological evil lies in agency: corruption unequivocally stems from direct human choices and actions, not divine omnipotence or inherent creation flaws. Unlike natural evil, attributed to impersonal forces, corruption results from moral agents deliberately choosing self-interest over the common good (Pojman & Pojman, 2012). This presents an "agency problem" when analogising to the problem of evil. Furthermore, the "omnipotence paradox" of theodicy–how a good, omnipotent God permits evil–doesn't directly apply, as human beings, not an omnipotent being, are responsible for corruption.

However, this difference does not invalidate the analogy. The concept of systemic corruption generates conditions that eerily parallel the effects of natural evil. When critical infrastructure collapses due to embezzled funds, or healthcare systems fail because resources are siphoned off, the suffering caused–loss of life, poverty, despair–can be as indiscriminate and devastating as a natural disaster. In such scenarios, the individual acts of corruption aggregate to create a "horrendous evil," a state of affairs so profound in its negative impact that it threatens to negate the meaning and value of human lives, much like severe natural catastrophes (Adams, 1999). Moreover, systemic corruption severely limits the meaningful exercise of individual agency towards good. This makes it extraordinarily difficult for even well-intentioned individuals to avoid complicity or become agents of change, thus rendering the analogy between systemic corruption and theological evil more apt than it first appears.

Plantinga's Free Will Defence and Systemic Corruption

Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defence traditionally argues that God's permission of evil is logically consistent with His omnipotence and goodness, as it is necessary for the existence of free creatures capable of choosing good (Plantinga, 1974). Recontextualising this defence, we can observe a similar dynamic in systemic corruption. While individuals within a corrupt system technically retain free will, the environment is so pervasively structured that choosing to act with integrity often comes at an unbearable cost–loss of livelihood, social ostracisation, or even personal danger. The system itself, through its incentives and penalties, effectively constrains the meaningful exercise of free will towards good (Feinberg, 2003). In Nigeria, for instance, a public official might desire to be honest, but the entrenched **practices** of bribery and patronage, coupled with the lack of accountability, create immense pressure to conform. This systemic pressure turns "free" choices into choices with severely limited, often negative, options for virtue.

Adams on Horrendous Evils: When Corruption Becomes Systemic

Marilyn McCord Adams introduces the concept of "horrendous evils," defined as those evils "the participation in (or apprehension of) which constitutes *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given the horrendous evil) be a great good to him" (Adams, 1999, p. 28). These are evils so devastating that they threaten to undermine the meaning and value of a human life. While Adams primarily applied this to traditional theodicy, her concept profoundly resonates with systemic corruption. When corruption in Nigeria leads to the collapse of public healthcare, leaving millions without access to basic medical care, or when educational funds are embezzled, denying generations a future, the cumulative suffering becomes horrendous. The loss of dignity, the pervasive sense of injustice, and the profound despair inflicted by such systemic failures can lead citizens to question the very goodness and value of their lives and society. This framework helps us understand that corruption, far from being merely a series of individual transgressions, can evolve into a deep-seated societal malady that inflicts suffering on a scale comparable to natural disasters or other profound evils.

Social Contract Theory

Social contract theorists like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that governments exist to protect people from chaos and to serve the common good (Hobbes, 1996; Locke, 1988; Rousseau, 1968). In this framework, political power is a trust, and leaders are stewards of public welfare. However, in Nigeria, this social contract is often broken or ignored. Many officials behave as though the state is a private estate, using their positions for personal gain rather than public service. This fundamentally breaches the social contract, undermining the state's legitimacy and leading to widespread public distrust (Rawls, 1971).

This betrayal creates a vicious cycle where people seek office not to serve, but to enrich themselves. This contrasts sharply with African philosophy, which emphasises community, shared responsibility, and moral interdependence. The concept of *ubuntu*, which is "I am because we are," captures this vision. Philosophers like John Mbiti and Kwame Gyekye argue that personal identity and morality are deeply rooted in the well-being of the community (Gyekye, 1996; Mbiti, 1969).

1

Augustine's Privation

Evil as absence of good rather than an independent force. Corruption twists intended public service into personal gain (Augustine, 398-400/1998a).

2

Social Contract Breakdown

Leaders violate trust by treating the state as a private estate. This creates a cycle of office-seeking for enrichment, undermining state legitimacy (Hobbes, 1996; Rawls, 1971).

3

African Ubuntu Philosophy

"I am because we are" - community-centred morality contradicts individualistic corrupt practices (Gyekye, 1996).

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS: JUSTIFYING THE ANALOGY

This section provides a rigorous philosophical justification for comparing systemic corruption to the problem of evil. This analogy is not mere rhetoric but highlights deep structural and moral parallels between these profound challenges.

1

The Structural Similarity Argument

Both systemic corruption and traditional evil pose similar logical puzzles. If good governance is achievable, why does corruption persist? This mirrors the theological dilemma: if God is good and omnipotent, why does evil exist? In both cases, the contradiction between an ideal state (good governance/divine goodness) and a pervasive negative reality (corruption/evil) demands deeper philosophical inquiry.

2

The Systemic Nature Defence

Systemic corruption often transcends individual agency, creating conditions parallel to natural evil. When embezzled funds lead to infrastructure collapse or failing healthcare, the resulting suffering–loss of life, poverty, despair–is as indiscriminate and devastating as a natural disaster. Such aggregate individual acts form a "horrendous evil," profound in its negative impact, threatening to negate human life's meaning and value, akin to severe natural catastrophes (Adams, 1999). This shows how systemic corruption creates quasi-natural conditions where individuals are constrained by larger forces, much like natural evil.

3

The Moral Equivalence Thesis

The impact of systemic corruption on human flourishing is morally equivalent to traditional evil, justifying the philosophical parallel. Adams (1999) states horrendous evils undermine life's meaning. When corruption collapses public healthcare or diverts educational funds, the cumulative suffering becomes horrendous. The loss of dignity, injustice, and despair force citizens to question life's value and society's goodness. This moral equivalency legitimises using frameworks for theological evil to analyse corruption's societal devastation.

4 Responding to the Agency Objection

While corruption involves human choice, unlike theodicy's divine permission, systemic corruption creates quasi-natural conditions that constrain individual moral agency. Plantinga's Free Will Defence argues God's permission of evil allows for free creatures (Plantinga, 1974). However, within a corrupt system, choosing integrity often carries unbearable costs—loss of livelihood, ostracization, or danger. The system's incentives and penalties effectively constrain meaningful free will towards good, making the analogy apt despite differing "permission" sources.

5 The Inherited Sin Parallel

Like Augustine's original sin, corrupt systems are often inherited, burdening new generations with choices they didn't make. Augustine viewed evil as an absence of good. Similarly, systemic corruption is a privation of good governance and societal trust, twisting public service into personal gain. New generations operate within these entrenched structures, akin to inheriting original sin. This inherited systemic burden makes ethical action extraordinarily difficult without significant personal sacrifice, creating a moral predicament like inherited sin.

These methodological considerations robustly defend using the problem of evil as an analytical lens for systemic corruption, drawing upon established philosophical literature like Adams (1999) and Plantinga (1974), and echoing themes from social contract theorists Hobbes (1996), Locke (1988), Rousseau (1968), and African philosophers Mbiti (1969) and Gyekye (1996).

NIGERIA'S EXISTENTIAL REALITY AND THE NORMALISATION OF EVIL

The roots of Nigeria's corrupt system can be traced back to colonial administration, which introduced a bureaucratic model largely disconnected from indigenous values and communal ethics (Ekeh, 1975). Colonial officers governed through indirect rule and patronage, creating a system where loyalty to the state was often tied to personal survival and advantage, not to public service. This historical disconnection from moral accountability laid the groundwork for a bureaucratic culture where dishonesty became functionally useful, even necessary.

Figure 1: Illustration of urban inequality in Nigeria reflects the systemic effects of historical corruption.

Figure 1 visually highlights the stark urban disparities and systemic inequality in contemporary Nigeria. Post-independence, military regimes entrenched corruption by institutionalising impunity and authoritarianism. Leaders like Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha massively looted state resources, creating a political culture where might was right and power was used to dominate, not serve (Gyekye, 1996; Mbiti, 1969). Nigeria's current corruption problem is, in part, the moral residue of these historical legacies.

For young Nigerians, corruption is an existential condition: civil servants demand bribes, officials enrich themselves with impunity, and the justice system favours the wealthy. The 2022 arrest of former Accountant-General Ahmed Idris for allegedly embezzling over ₦109 billion (Premium Times, 2022) reinforced public perception of routine state resource looting by those at the top.

Colonial Legacy — 1

Bureaucratic systems disconnected from indigenous values fostered patronage and personal advantage over public service.

2 — Military Regimes

Institutionalised impunity and authoritarianism; leaders like Babangida and Abacha looted resources, establishing a might-makes-right culture.

Normalisation of Corruption — 3

Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil": routine, thoughtless participation in unjust systems through everyday corrupt acts.

In such an environment, Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil" becomes highly relevant. Arendt noted how evil normalises through routine, thoughtless participation in unjust systems (Arendt, 2006). In Nigeria today, this manifests in everyday evils: bribes for jobs, inflated contracts, and ghost workers on government payrolls.

RESPONDING TO CORRUPTION AS A PROBLEM OF EVIL

If corruption in Nigeria can be likened to the problem of evil, then it demands a multi-layered response: ethical, political, and spiritual. Evil, whether moral or systemic, thrives when it goes unchallenged. The same is true of corruption. Addressing it will require not just punishment or reform, but a reawakening of the national conscience, through a theological and ethical approach.

Ethical Responses

Undoubtedly, a return to virtue ethics is crucial and fundamental. Aristotle's idea of *eudaimonia*, often translated as human flourishing, suggests that the good life is achieved through the development of moral character (Aristotle, 1999). In a society like Nigeria's, where shortcuts and dishonesty are often rewarded, education must go beyond academics and focus on shaping character. Moral education, both in schools and in homes, should promote virtues like honesty, courage, temperance, and justice. This is not a quick fix. It means encouraging people to act ethically even when no one is watching, and to see integrity not as a burden but as a path to personal and communal dignity. Ethical formation must become a lifelong habit, not merely obedience to rules or fear of punishment.

Political Responses

Ethical renewal must be matched with institutional reform. Anti-corruption agencies such as EFCC and ICPC require genuine autonomy, statutory protection, and stable funding to operate free from political interference. As the Centre for Fiscal Transparency & Public Integrity observed, provisions like Section 3(2) of the EFCC Act, which enables the President to remove the EFCC chair, severely erode agency independence and public trust.

Ethical Education

Character formation through virtue ethics in schools and homes, promoting honesty, courage, temperance, and justice.

Institutional Reform

Strengthen anti-corruption agencies with genuine autonomy, statutory protection, and stable funding, free from political interference.

Civil Society Engagement

Protect whistle-blowers and promote civic participation. Citizens must feel empowered to speak out against injustice.

Hope and Redemption

Just as the problem of evil in theology points to the hope of future justice - an eschatological resolution - Nigeria's moral and political crisis also calls for hopeful renewal. This should not be passive optimism, but rather an active search for transformation. We have already seen signs of hope in the youth activism in the #EndSARS movement (even if its goals were not fully achieved), which has shown that a new generation refuses to accept business as usual (Sogunro, 2019). Digital tools and AI are increasingly utilised to track government spending, monitor elections, and expose fraud. These innovations are helping to build a culture of transparency and accountability.

In Christian tradition, the Jubilee was a time of forgiveness, restoration, and social reset. This idea can serve as a political and spiritual metaphor for Nigeria's future. The Jubilee of Hope, recently emphasised by both religious and civic voices, reminds us that transformation is possible (Francis, 2024). What is needed is the courage to begin again and the collective will to choose good over evil.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research reveals that, among other things, the negative effect of corruption is that it hinders economic growth and development. It opens the door for inefficient allocations of the country's resources, raises the cost of investment and decreases investors' confidence. Research has revealed that countries with a notoriously high level of corruption risk marginalisation because corruption deters foreign investment, disrupts trade, and restricts access to international capital, which are all key drivers of modern economic development (World Bank, 2017).

Secondly, it exacerbates inadequacies and inefficiencies in private sector projects and services. The diversion of public funds enriches some whilst impoverishing others. It stifles the initiatives of potential experts in the private sector and perpetuates incompetent individuals in positions of power, despite an abundance of wealth. Moreover, it desecrates the rule of law and undermines the legitimacy and stability of democratic regimes; indeed, as one publication highlights, "corruption damages social and economic development in a variety of ways."

Economic Impact

Hinders growth, inefficient resource allocation, deters foreign investment, restricts access to international capital.

Social Consequences

Enriches few whilst impoverishing many, stifles private sector initiatives, perpetuates incompetence in leadership positions.

Political Undermining

Desecrates rule of law, undermines democratic legitimacy and stability, damages governance structures.

The implementation of the sustainable development process is contingent upon the presence of several features. Firstly, it demands prudent, rational and far-sighted decision-making. Secondly, it requires the best use to be made of available resources. Thirdly, it needs principled leadership that enjoys the understanding and support of the people. Unfortunately, corruption diminishes the pillars of these aforementioned elements. To a large extent, irrational and short-sighted decisions are taken. This is so because decisions taken are motivated by greed and not by need.

WAY FORWARD: A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

A country that thrives on corruption, like Nigeria, can hardly sustain a just and equitable society where justice, peace, and love reign supreme. In view of this, Nigeria needs a reorientation and reshaping of its negative value system. Indeed, no fundamental changes can take place in such a society without considering the religious factors, an all-embracing phenomenon in all societies, Nigeria being no exception.

Long before now, lone voices like those of Cardinal Anthony Olubunmi Okogie and Bishop Gbonigi have been heard. The time is now ripe for the Church, through its concerted efforts, to rise up and protest against all forms of corruption and social injustice in the country. The Church should stand against and confront every evil and anomaly with the truth of God, condemning, correcting, and guiding society towards a godly society. The Church must be the conscience of the people, fearless in its bid to preach the truth like the prophets of old.

The Church, acting as the mouthpiece of the masses and the voice of the voiceless, must not rest on its laurels. It is expected of the Church and its leaders to take a concrete viewpoint alongside the oppressed, the impoverished, the marginalised, those denied their rights, and those discriminated against. The Catholic Church in Nigeria indeed has a significant moral and theological obligation to engage with systemic issues affecting Nigerians.

Church as Conscience

Religious institutions must fearlessly preach truth, condemn corruption, and guide society towards moral renewal like prophets of old.

Voice of Voiceless

The Church should advocate for oppressed, impoverished, and marginalised citizens, taking a concrete stance alongside those denied rights.

Righteous Leadership

Advocate for leaders who prioritise the common good over selfish gain through homilies, public statements, and direct engagement.

As the scripture found in Proverbs 29:2 states, "when the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan..." The situation in Nigeria today is not dissimilar to what biblical wisdom warns against, so the Church should set out to allay the just groans and grief of Nigerians. The Church must consistently advocate for righteous leadership that prioritises the common good over selfish gain through homilies, public statements, and direct engagements.

CONCLUSION: CORRUPTION AS NIGERIA'S MORAL CRISIS

Corruption in Nigeria is more than just bad governance; it is a deep moral problem, similar to the problem of evil in philosophy. Just as evil challenges our belief in a good and just world, corruption challenges our hope in justice, fairness, and shared responsibility. It affects not only our institutions but our values, our trust in one another, and our belief in integrity. This is not just a legal or political issue; it is a question of who we are as a people. When corruption becomes normalised, it poisons the minds of the next generation and weakens the moral foundation of society.

The Nigerian society must take a stand. Fighting corruption requires more than laws or policies; it demands a return to virtue, the strengthening of institutions, and a bold commitment to truth and justice. This principle is borne out in empirical governance research. For instance, in Uganda's health sector, reported bribery rates fell by half between 2010 and 2015 following the establishment of the Health Monitoring Unit (Peiffer et al., 2018). Also, in Zambia, President Mwanawasa's shift towards transformational leadership, which emphasises vision, ethical behaviour, and emotional intelligence, played a critical role in reshaping institutional norms and reducing political corruption (Lifuka & Haricharan, 2024).

01

Recognition

Recognise corruption as a moral crisis affecting values, trust, and integrity–not merely a legal or political problem.

02

Collective Action

Return to virtue, strengthen institutions, and commit to truth and justice through religious, political, and community leadership, emphasising ethical behaviour.

03

Hope and Renewal

Find hope in civic renewal, ethical leadership, and a united pursuit of the common good with measurable governance outcomes.

Like the problem of evil, corruption may not have easy answers. But it demands serious reflection, moral courage, and collective action. If theology leads us to hope in grace and redemption, then Nigeria must find hope in civic renewal, ethical leadership, and a united pursuit of the common good. Such aspirations cannot remain abstract ideals but must be translated into measurable outcomes using governance and civic engagement indicators.

For Nigeria, the integration of ethical leadership with such measurable governance and civic engagement indicators can provide a practical roadmap, ensuring that cultural transformation translates into institutional integrity and tangible development outcomes.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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