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RELIGIOUS RESPONSE TO BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Nigerian socio-political and religious clime and indeed the global community is faced with cases of bribery and corruption which has contributed less to socio-economic, infrastructural and human capital development. Bribery and corruption as a cankerworm has now become a common language in almost every sphere in the Nigerian polity in that without bribery services are denied, justices, rights and privileges perverted and ignominy overtly celebrated. Due to the enormous effect of bribery and corruption to humanity and the society at large, nations of the world have put up measures to stern the activities of bribery and corruption. However, the more measures are put in place to put an end to bribery and corruption, the more bribery and corruption heightens. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the religious response to bribery and corruption in the Nigeria society from the Christian and African religious perspective. The paper examines what constitute bribery and corruption and the implication of indulging in bribery and corruption in the Nigerian society. Moreover, the paper considers the biblical position on the issue of bribery and corruption and how the African indigenous religion perceives bribery and corruption. *Employing the phenomenological and descriptive methods, the paper shows how bribery* and corruption can be stern for socio-economic, spiritual and human capital development of the Nigerian society. The paper recommends four measures that could be employed to

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stern bribery and corruption which includes advocacy, teaching and maintaining the right ethical principles in the religion of the devotees, oath taking, counselling and rehabilitation. **Keywords**: Corruption, EFCC, ICPC, Spiritual and Human Capital Development

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Introduction

The Nigerian socio-political and religious sectors is ravaged with cases of bribery and corruption and this have impinged on the socio-economic, political and infrastructural development of the Nigerian nation. Bribery and corruption has now become a common language in most sectors in the Nigerian enclave in that without bribery most services urgently needed are overtly denied and through bribery justices, rights and privileges are turned upside down and promotion earned even in the Christian organizations. Although, there is no nation of the world that is corruption free. However, most countries in the global community have put certain measures in place such as legislation of life imprisonment, death sentence, demotion or termination of appointment, compulsory retirement or forfeiture of one's properties to the government by those found culpable among others to see that they get rid of bribery and corruption in their socio-political and religious life.

For instance, the Nigerian nation in a bid to eradicate bribery and corruption in her socio-political and religious circle established anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Commission (ICPC), and recently Proceeds of Crime Recovery and Management Agency. However, the establishment of these agencies have yielded little or no result as bribery and corruption seems to be thriving at an alarming rate in the Nigerian nation with even the head of the former agency Mr. Ibrahim Magu, several political juggernaut and religious colossus being accused of corruption. Consequently, causing increase in poverty, unemployment, epileptic or no basic amenities, moral decadence, social vices, apathy, inflation in the prices of goods and services just to mention a few.

Consequent upon the above assertion, this paper centres on religious response to bribery and corruption in Nigeria from the Christian and African religious perspective. It focuses on what the religious entities could do to help fight the incursion of bribery and corruption in the Nigerian polity. This is premised on the fact that established agencies of government saddled with the responsibility to curb the influx of bribery and corruption in the nation have either failed or compromised in their responsibility. Although cases of bribery and corruption as previously opined have been reported among some Nigerian religious leaders, their congregations and denominations. On the contrary, should religious figures be silent at the upsurge in bribery and corruption in the Nigerian socio-political

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and religious clime even though few individuals have been accused of bribery and corruption? This poser and many more are germane in this paper and are considered from the Christian and African religious point of view.

The paper addresses issues such as what the terms bribery and corruption connotes and the causes of bribery and corruption. It also examines what constitute bribery and the implications of permitting bribery and corruption in the Nigerian society. The paper further discusses how bribery and corruption can be stern in the Nigerian socio-political and religious spheres to enable infrastructural, economic, spiritual and human capital developments. Similarly, the paper brings to lime light the biblical perspective on the issue of bribery and corruption and the African religious view on the concept of bribery and corruption. Moreover, the paper reveals what should constitute the contemporary Christian and African religious stand in matters of bribery and corruption. Conclusively, some measures which could be employed to eradicate bribery and corruption in the Nigerian polity and the global community are also emphasized.

What is Bribery and Corruption?

The giving of a gift to someone to facilitate a request and the acceptance of such gift for the intended purpose is commonly known as bribery. Bribery is giving money or favour to someone who is in a position of trust in order to pervert their judgment or corrupt their conduct. The purpose of the gift is usually intended to make the person act illegally, unjustly or immorally. However, if the purpose for giving a gift is not to arouse favour or enforce some requirement in the present or in the future, the gift cannot be termed a bribe (Kunhiyop 165, 167). On the other hand, corruption connotes dishonest conduct or an act against the expected norm for selfish gains. Corruption also denotes the absence or lack of integrity from a person or group of persons towards responsibilities committed to them. Integrity here connotes the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness or the state of being of sound moral principle, uprightness, honesty, and sincerity (ahdictionary.com). In other words, corruption is the opposite of integrity, honesty, truth, moral soundness, wholeness, sincerity etc.

Corruption manifest in different forms some of which are fraud, extortion, bribery, nepotism, tribalism, contract scam, plagiarism, examination malpractice, rigging of election, vote buying and vote selling etc. In the view of Umejesi factors such as poverty, greed, unemployment, political instability, failed governmental systems

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and policies, favouritism in the administration of justice and rule of law, ethnicity, and moral laxity among others have been identified as the common causes of bribery and corruption (96-97). In the Nigerian context, different coded terms such as kola nuts, brown envelop, welfare package, apostolic blessing, Ghana must go, *akaazu*-that is giving through the back among others are used to describe bribery and corruption (Gwamna 435). The consequences of bribery and corruption are enormous. It enables societal vices such as drug trafficking, human killing for rituals, armed robbery, internet fraud, kidnapping, militancy, banditry, money laundering and disregard for constituted authorities and the rule of law. Moreover, bribery and corruption promotes hunger, poverty, oppression, mortality, extinction of ethical values and impinges on the socio-economic, spiritual and infrastructural development of a nation. The reality of this thoughts is evident in the Nigerian nation.

Bribery and Corruption: The Nigerian Situation

The Nigeria nation is blessed with the abundance of natural and human resources. However, despite the huge endowment of natural and human resources in the nation, the Nigerian society is still bedevilled with plethora of bribery and corruption. Historical antecedents reveal that both the former military as well as the democratic leaders of the Nigerian nation have been accused of bribery and corruption to the detriment of the nation. For instance, the "former military president General Ibrahim Babaginda swindled \$12.4 billion of Nigeria's oil sales during the Gulf war while General Sani Abacha, Nigeria's late head of state, looted billions of naira to foreign banks" (Gwamna 440). Umejesi adds that the Pius Okigbo's 1994 report revealed that over \$12.2 billion out of the wind fall was spent on unspecified projects. This is in addition to an alleged swindling of \$200 million from the Ikot-Abasi Aluminium project. The story is not different among some state governor's like Joshua Dariye, Alameiyeseigha of Plateau and Bayelsa state respectively and senators like Enweren, Okadigbo, Ayim, Wabara and ministers like Chief Tony Ananih who were all removed from office as a result of alleged corrupt activities during the democratic reign of Olusegun Obasanjo (100-101).

Jonathan recalls the over one hundred billion naira Nigeria Ports Authority scam masterminded by Bode George, the case of the National Pension Commission (PENCOM) in which a female clerk diverted over half a billion naira into her private account and the alleged embezzlement of over 45billion naira by a former Federal minister of works. He further opines that within the past democratic

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dispensation, cases of National electricity projects, Ajaokuta steel project, roads, airports and water projects are some good instances which many political leaders have been fingered. Some of whom are Tony Anenih, Liyel Imoke, Bode George, Olusegun Agagu, Iyabo Obasanjo, Patricia Etteh, Tafa Balogun, Sunday Ehindero (Jonathan 304-308).

In July 2020, the Minister in charge of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Senator Godswill Akpabio appeared before House of Representative NDDC committee panel for probing of the commission to explain his role and involvement in spending of over 40 billion naira within six months in the commission. Similarly, the chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Mr. Ibrahim Magu appeared before Justice Ayo Salami led presidential panel to explain his activities bordering on corruption and abuse of office and his involvement in the recovered loots of the federation both within and outside the country being spear headed by the commission. The watch dog chairman, Mr. Ibrahim Magu was alleged to have mishandled recovered loots of the federation from disgruntled elements in the country and also sold seized assets to his cronies which he denied by describing the allegations as nonsense (Amadi-Nche 178-179).

Ogedegbe corroborating the above thoughts opines that almost every sector in the Nigerian polity which includes the judiciary, police force, business world, political setting, academia and even the religious organization among others is engrossed with corruption. She asserts that in some public institutions certificate racketeering, sex for grade, plagiarism, writing of thesis and dissertations by university lecturers among others are the hallmarks of our higher institutions. Moreover, while the police who ought to protect the lives and properties of the Nigerian citizens mount illegal road blocks just to extort commuters on the high way the judiciary which ought to be the hope of the common man is enmeshed with cases of corruption as some magistrates and judges have been arraigned for demanding bribes before granting bail applications (198-199).

As well stated the religious circle is not innocent of this menace as leaders of notable religious organization have been either caught or accused of bribery and corruption. For instance, the former president of the Christian Association of Nigeria pastor Ayo Oritsejafor was said to have received a whooping sum of seven million naira under the Good luck Ebele Jonathan administration and the money

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could not be properly accounted for hitherto. In like manner prominent cleric has been accused of forgery, looting, fraud, embezzlement, sexual promiscuity thus dragging the name of God to the mud. From the foregoing, it is evident that some Christians and even Christian religious leaders are culpable of this endemic. What is the biblical perspective on bribery and corruption? Do the scriptures give credence to bribery and corruption? This is the focus of the next section.

Biblical Perspective on Bribery and Corruption

It is not an exaggeration to state that bribery and corruption prevailed to a large extent in the socio-economic, political and religious milieu in the biblical world. However, the biblical perspective on bribery and corruption is crystal clear. The scriptures explicitly states that "And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous" (Exodus 23:8 NKJV). Deuteronomy 10:17 remarks "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe" (NKJV). In addition, Deuteronomy 16:19 reads "You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous" (NKJV). Similarly, scriptural text such as 1Kings 21; Acts 8:9-25, Ezekiel 22:2-12, Isaiah 1:2 among others reveals the biblical stand on bribery and corruption. Apparently from these scriptural texts and many others text which has reference to the issue bribery and corruption, it is vivid that the bible condemns and proscribes bribery and corruption even making an inducement of any form is detestable by the scriptures thus such act must be discouraged. Although most biblical allusions to bribery and corruption are geared towards judicial settings, however, the prohibition is general (Mason 202).

Similarly, the scriptures in proscribing bribery and corruption also identifies other corrupt practices such as using dishonest scales to defraud buyers (Hosea 12:7; Amos 8:5; Deut. 25:15; Prov. 20:23), cheating to a neighbour (Lev. 6:2), among others and maintains that such act and practices must be condemned and prohibited. As previously opined, despite the prohibition of bribery and corruption and other related corrupt practices, it was still practised in ancient biblical world. Kunhiyop asserts that while in the account of proverbs an adulterer was spotted attempting to pacify an offended spouse with a bribe (6:35), King Asa endeavoured to bribe Ben-hadad to break a political treaty (1Kings 15:18-20). Likewise, in the New Testament, while Judas Iscariot was bribed to betray Jesus

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(Luke 22:3-5), the chief priest bribed the soldiers at the tomb of Jesus requesting that they say that Jesus's disciples came at night and stole Him away while they slept (Matthew 28:11-15). He also remarks that Acts 24:26 shows that Felix a corrupt public official required a bribe before he could consider the release of Paul from prison custody (170).

From the foregoing it is clear that God hates and proscribes bribery and corruption. God neither takes nor receives bribes. Therefore, those who are His disciples must desist from accepting or giving bribes or partaking in any corrupt practices. The aforementioned biblical texts do not only forbid bribery and corruption but show the result on those who follow biblical perspective in rejecting bribery and corruption (Proverb 15:27) and the penalties of those who choose the path of bribery and corruption (Prov. 29:4).

Christian Religious Response to Bribery and Corruption

From the earlier discussion, it is very clear that the biblical traditions prohibit bribery and corruption. However, in the contemporary times as previously opined bribery and corruption prevail in almost every sector in the Nigerian clime. Thus, the thrust of this section is to emphasize the response of Christians to bribery and corruption. In other words, how can Christians assist in the fight of bribery and corruption and what should constitute the Christians attitude in the face of bribery and corruption in the modern time is the essence of this sub-theme. Granted that even Christians are guilty of the subject under consideration, the first step to curb bribery and corruption in the contemporary time apart from praying for perpetuators of such act to come back to the true biblical and ethical living is for perpetuators of such act to repent. The word repentance is the English equivalent of the Hebrew word naham and sub which means "to lament, grieve, be sorry, change one's mind" and "to turn back, return" respectively. Repentance further signifies "to change one's mind or purpose from sin against God and humanity for the better or an amendment" (Vine, 525). It also means "change of heart and mind, turning towards a better way; deep regret for a past action or course of action" (E. Richard Pigeon, 872).

Repentance in the sense of the word "affects the whole personality: the intellect, in that repentance involves a change of mind regarding a person's sin, involving recognition of guilt and helplessness before God; this leads to an emotional element, a change of feeling showing itself in sorrow for sin" (Woodbridge, 730-

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731). True repentance entails a change in emotional and behavioural attitude, a consciousness that sin is an offense to God and humanity. Just like John the Baptist advocated for social and political change in his time, it is fitting for stakeholders in sector in the Nigerian nation to embrace behavioural change towards every sector which they occupy functioning and playing their roles with maximum consciousness of heart. The implication is that those who steal public and private assets are encouraged to make restitution and steal no more, while those who oppress the poor masses are called to show love, hospitality and co-operation with one another (Amad-Nche, 180).

Besides, those who intimidate with their position, power, connections and uniforms and even rig electoral processes are charged to desist from such act and repent. John the Baptist in Luke 3:1-12 emphasized baptism of repentance which is a clarion call to a change of heart, turning around from evil to doing the right things; developing a right attitude towards God and humanity. John the Baptist message was apt. He denounced the religious and socio-political machination, oppression and corruption and inhumane treatments in his time and warned the people of God's impending judgment. He called the people to repent from their sins and turn to God. As opined in this paper, for the socio-political and religious spheres in Nigeria to be reckoned with in the present time, the people who live in it which includes politicians, civil and public servants, traders, students, military and paramilitary men and women, traditional leaders and even religious leaders, must consciously and persistently decide to maintain integrity. They must repent, that is, turnaround from wrong and resolve to doing the right things always (Amad-Nche, 180-181).

Furthermore, apart from condemning the act of bribery and corruption overtly, authorities concerned must as a matter of seriousness prosecute those suspected of practising bribery and involved in other corrupt practices. This would form as deterrent to others who may be wishing to join in the unethical crusade of bribery and corruption. Similarly, those to be prosecuted should not only be junior workers who may have learnt the act of bribery and other corrupt practices from their superiors. Rather the superiors also should be made to face the full weight of the law. Accordingly, the arrest and current prosecution of DSP Abba Yari who was fingered in drug dealings and other illegal activities by the NDLEA is a case study. Moreover, the arrest of a onetime inspector general of the Nigerian Police Force accused of corruption in office is another case at hand. Besides, the dismissal

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of some police officers caught in viral videos in this current administration and their subsequent prosecution for extorting commuter on the high way is another instance. All these measures taken are geared towards sanitizing the Nigerian clime to rid her of disgruntled element capable of causing more damages to the Nigerian system.

Likewise, Christians in their family, religious centres and institutions must begin to promote such virtues as honesty, transparency, trustworthiness, hard work, dignity, integrity and honour. The church must return to sound biblical teaching and doctrines rather than stressing on materialism. When the family which is the smallest unit of the society is accurate in the transmission of the under listed virtues, the church also right in the dissemination of the true biblical teachings and doctrines, the larger society will be rightfully informed. Kunhiyop consenting to this view asserts that individual's ethnic affiliation should not be a factor in appointing them to positions or assigning rewards rather competence, honesty and hard work must be the watch word. He further remarks that accountability and transparency must be embraced at every level of government and religious leaders must live by example by being accountable of their stewardship (172).

Also, the Christian institution must not allow herself to be a hiding place for corrupt public servants. In order to achieve this feat, the church and Christian religious centres must institute seminars, symposium, pragmatic teaching sessions and conferences where the consequences of engaging in bribery and corruption must be practically taught using the scriptures. This is a way of proving the innocence of the church and Christian institutions. Conversely, when prosecution and convictions are secured by a court of competent jurisdiction, the Christian community and government must refrain from interfering before and after the prosecution and conviction. However, they may engage such person or group of persons in active counselling sessions geared towards rehabilitating such a person's even in the house of correction. All these measures if properly admitted and promoted by the Christian religious spheres is capable of reducing bribery and corruption in the Nigerian nation.

African Traditional Religious Response to Bribery and Corruption

Corruption as a cankerworm has continued to be one of the crucial factors hampering the expansion of political, economic, social and religious development in Nigeria and many other countries. African traditional religion no doubt is not

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exempted in relation to the issue of corruption. Though as an indigenous religion of the people, it has a conscious or subconscious way of instilling fear in the minds of its adherents. Kanu observes that African Traditional Religion is a religion that has been with Africans for many generations, and with which they have lived their lives and solved their existential problems from time immemorial. It is a religion that is a co-terminus with the African people and their society (7). Relatively, Awolalu avers that it is the indigenous religious belief and practices of Africans. It is a religion that emanated from the sustaining faith heed by African forbears (1). Adherents of African Religion have elaborate system of morals and levels of discipline, this makes them worship with sincerity because their worship is very meaningful to them, as they hold tenaciously to the covenant binding them with their forebears. Sanctions and taboos are placed on certain behaviours and this also helps to checkmate conducts of people in the society. Olukayode observes that in African Traditional Religion, spirits communicate the catalogue of ethical standards required of the adherents. For instance, the Orunmila cult in South Western Nigeria prescribes the type of (white) dress and (honest and hygienic) behaviour of its worshippers (181). Similarly, Dhirku, notes that the traditional Ifa corpus associated with the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria imposes several dos and don'ts on the activities of humanity in relation to nature. If a 'encourages hard work, emphasizes honesty and devotion to duty, abhors dictatorial actions given to human mentality, and promotes more consultation with the esoteric for divine guidance towards good governance on earth' (7).

Traditionally speaking, African Traditional Religion regulate behaviours in the society by administering immediate fairness against moral standards. The *Amadioha deity* among the people of Etche (Rivers state) often attack home of offenders in form of bees, and in some instances strike offenders with thunder while *Ayelala among* the people of Yoruba, kills by engulfing its victim's stomach with water. It is patent to note that these powers are still efficacious in African societies and can't be subjected to scientific verification, as science is yet to unravel the mystery. In spite of all this, African traditional religion is still not totally free from corruption, its potency does not immune it from this menace, as mediums of this revered religion now manipulate oracular divinations in some circumstances to suit their personal cravings.

A vivid example could be drawn from the long juju of Arochukwu (Ibibi Ukpabi) whose activities where manipulated by the chief priest for selfish gain. The long

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Juju is believed to be a deity for dispute resolution in the community, as it punishes perpetrators of crimes. The shrine of Ibibi Ukpabi served as a supreme court for the people of Arochukwu Kingdom, modern day Abia State. Anyone accused of a crime is brought before this deity, the person would be made to walk through the tunnel of disappearance at the shrine to receive his/her judgement, and if the person returns back to his people, he/she is innocent, if otherwise, it is believed that he/she is guilty and would never return back to his/her people. Culprits were killed beside a flowing river called the "Red river". When the river turns red, the family of the victims believes they have been killed by the gods. During the era of slave trade in Africa, the priests of this deity saw it as an avenue to immense wealth for themselves. Offenders were no longer killed as they walk pass the tunnel, but sold to slave merchants. Animals were now killed as their blood flow down the river, families of the victims would cry home believing their son or daughter had been killed. Another instance is what present itself as a gift. People try to cover up their sins by sending bribes in form of gifts to chief priests, when their matter is called up, the chief priests devise means of covering their shame, by not calling up their case, or by speaking from self without spirit possession.

Furthermore, there are rampant cases of ritual murders through the use of ATR, suspected cases of advancement cybercrime/Fraud; popularly known as yahoo/yahoo plus, armed-robbery and lots more, are some of the ways ATR is believed to be fuelling corruption in Nigeria. Correspondingly, the activities of notorious armed robbers such as Lawrence Anini, who terrorized residents of Benin city, in the then Bendel State in the mid-1980s and different shades of fraudsters who appear on television and in the print media, from time to time, for offences connected with hypnotism, intimidation and stealing by trick, among others, have confused to have acquired their power of immunity from the supernatural powers that are deployable in ATR. (Human Rights Watch 2007). Irrespective of the pitfalls of the representatives of the deities, the arch deity, of the people known as Ali/Ala/Ele, depending on the vernacular, has over the years represented distinctly the wish of the people by punishing and disgracing defaulters, despite the application of human knowledge and greed to pervert justice. The earth goddess (*Ali/Ala/Ele*), in maintenance of fairness, disgraces those that might feel they are free from the grip of their atrocities by visiting them with mysterious death, sicknesses that defiles medical diagnosis, and lots more. This is achieved through oath swearing.

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Among the Ikwerre, People often resort to Otwu Owhor (invocation) when they discover that the umpires are bias and bought over and justice perverted. Thus, you see a person call on the deity (ies) for intervention and to give them fair hearing. On another note, the unsatisfied plaintiff may approach the chiefs and elders to libate to the gods for them. This act of oath taking is known as *Owhupu maya*, is believed to work faster than swearing. In this *owhupu maya*, the gods of the land and associated deities are called upon to act fast and expose whosoever that is untruthful. Thus, the chiefs might say "whosoever that is responsible for this act, may the gods of the land through the drink take the person". Enyindah observes that this *owhupu maya* (libation) is done by *owhor* (staff of justice) holders or the red cap chiefs. He further opines that in this process, the elders make use of the horn of a ram called "ahi-hia" to libate, which is accompanied with some incantation and chorus response from the group as "eh eh eh ehei" meaning "so shall it be". Thus act according to tradition is believed to vindicate the accused and punish the guilt (61-62).

According to a popular Ikwerre adage Okiri bird says that, "since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching". This witty saying has been employed by the Ikwerre people. Since some of them now go farther than the elders after swearing to an oath to manipulate the gods, by going to other higher deities. In line with another ikwerre adage "Agbara ka'ibea" (a deity is greater than another). On this premise, they go beyond the shores of their environment to invoke or unleash mayhem on their opponent, in such a way that the innocent might be seen to be guilty. The elders and chiefs, in order to seal and retain the potency of the oath, now devised the use of "Nkpara ele oko'madu and *owhor*" (staff of the elders and the sceptre of authority). Here, all the owhor holders and chiefs will gather their Nkpara, cross them together with the eldest among them pouring native gins (Akameu) and making incantation to the Ali deity, saying "anyone that would go back to reverse this oath, may such person die even as he is nursing the thought, may the person never succeed in his plans" as the other would echo "eh eh ehei" (so shall it be). After all this he will hit the owhor seven times on the ground, calling on all the deities in ikwerre Asa (seven) to give ear to their petition.

Conclusion

This concise paper which focused on religious response to bribery and corruption in Nigeria noted that almost every sector in the Nigerian polity is engrossed with

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the mark of bribery and corruption thus leading to retarded growth and underdevelopment of the Nigerian nation. However, the paper maintains that in the face of bribery and corruption in the Nigerian clime the religious institutions (Christianity and African traditional religion) through her response could play a leading role in the campaign against bribery and corruption by condemning such act at all levels and also support the arrest, prosecution and conviction of persons who may be found culpable of bribery and corruption irrespective of their sociopolitical and religious affiliations. This is to serve as deterrent to other. Moreover, traditional and religious institutions are encouraged to teach their adherents proper biblical, moral etiquette and traditional laws/customs and also sustain the fight against poverty, corruption, and social discrimination, and injustice, extortion among others through their teaching, consultations, oath taking, counselling and prayers. The reason adduced to this assertion is that most of the people who have been found culpable to this heinous crime in the Nigerian sociopolitical, educational and religious sectors just to mention a few are members of one religion or the other.

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