

## Applying Machiavelli's Idea of "Anti-church, Anti-clergy but not Anti-religion" to Tackling Corruption in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*In Nigeria, several well-known attempts to eradicate corruption and inform better policy-making have been made and implemented, such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), -Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIIS). Despite these attempts, the article perceives corruption to be lingering and new and innovative ways to fight corruption continue to be sought. Much time has been spent by government, among others, in establishing corruption as a symptom of systemic, institutional and governmental failure while religious aspects of corruption have been deliberately underplayed. Although a growing body of work is emerging that explores religious factors as one of the major causes of corruption. Of particular interest is the work of Machiavelli on religion. Machiavelli links corruption to the insolence of the clergy and the church, and that religion appealed to the selfishness of man through its doctrine of rewards and punishment, thereby inducing proper behaviour and good conduct that is necessary for the well-being of the society. Contrary to this, Nigerian society parades clergies and churches that serve as safe haven to looters of state's treasury who lodge them in churches as tithes, mission-works, offerings, and donations. These, partly contribute to the spread of corruption in Nigeria. It is in the light of this that the paper seeks to examine the utility of Machiavelli's idea of religion in curbing corruption in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Anti-church, Anti-clergy, Corruption, Idea, Religion*

### INTRODUCTION

Defining religion has been a thorny issue in the literature because the concept means different thing to different people and the way it is practiced differs from church to church or clergy to clergy. In the literature, many researchers have considered factors such as institutional failure, politics and economic, social and bad leadership as the cause of corruption, while those that have looked at corruption from the perspective of religion have focused on religious doctrines being the problem. This has created some limitations in addressing implications of actions of churches and clergies as the greatest perpetrators of corruption, however, few studies have pointed out the role of church in combating corruption (Orji, 2011; Shadabi, 2013; Adenugba and Omolawal, 2014). Religion in itself does not corrupt people, it is the key players of religion, the Clergy and the Church that seem to misrepresents what religion stands for. Corruption seems to persist in a society where the Clergy or Church makes 'Man' believes that his wrongs will always be forgiven more many times more possible than been punished. This, in the view of Machiavelli, is the weakness of Christianity in the face of justice. To him, Church and the Clergy tend to weaken 'Man' by making him perpetually indulged in the act of corruption because of the belief that he will always receive forgiveness and not punishment. Evidence shows that the Clergy, the Church and not religion are main agents of corruption and divisiveness in the society, Machiavelli in Sabine (1973). He wrote:

We Italians then we owe to the Church of Rome and to her priests our having become irreligious and bad; but we owe her a still greater debt and one that will be the cause of our ruins, namely, that the Church has kept and still keeps our country divided (Machiavelli cited in Sabine 1973:316).

From the foregoing, it obvious that key players of religion, the Church and the Clergy are the real problem. They are to preach justice and explore the religious doctrine of rewards and punishment, thereby inducing

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proper behaviour and good conduct that will enhance the wellbeing of the society. But studies (Shadabi, 2013; Adenugba and Omolawal, 2014; Oshewolo and Maren, 2015; Eyoh, 2015) have shown that most churches and clergies in Nigeria intentionally abandon deploying religious doctrine to instil justice in their members, rather, they preach prosperity sermons that tend to drive people into looting and stealing of public treasury. However, developments in Nigeria reveal that religious doctrines more on affluence, and its grave implications in the society have been well documented in Nigeria (Iyanda, 2012; Shadabi, 2013; Adenugba and Omolawal, 2014; Okolo and Akpokighe, 2014; Oshewolo and Maren, 2015; Eyoh, 2015). Evidence shows grave consequences which include great urge for mundane things, inordinate dressing in churches and wealth regardless of the source, looting of public funds to be donated in churches to finance church projects or as tithes and offering and living above monthly income (Yusuf, 2003, Onuoha, 2003; Ehusani, 2003; Orji, 2011). Confirming this view was the case of former Bank-PHB boss, Atuche who paid the sum of N45million to a Church as Tithes from stolen money. It was further revealed by Ogunbunmi (2012) that the money was paid to two Catholic Church branches in Delta State through a bank transfer from Bank PHB Mortgage Limited accounts.

Another case of church corruption is the case of one Agada, a member of Christ Embassy and an employee of Sheraton Hotels and Towers who stole 39 million naira from his company, and pay it as Tithes in the church. In reaction to his generosity, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome (the General Overseer of the church), gave him a commendation letter. Eventually, the theft was discovered, the Church admitted receiving the stolen funds but declined a refund (Rasheed cited in Falaye, 2013).

Further, any religion that is centred on prosperity sermons and not on the consequences of unrighteousness or punishment for wrong actions have implication for corrupt practices in public offices (Shadabi, 2013). Specifically, inordinate interests of religious leaders over prosperity sermons has implications for theft, bribery, injustice and looting of state's treasury which in the long run adversely affect Nigeria's socio-economic, political and cultural development (Onuoha, 2003). Added to this is the increased susceptibility of religious leaders in partisan politics occasioned by increasing rate of unholy romance between politicians and clergies or churches (Alanamu, 2009; Onongha, 2007; Adenugba and Omolawal, 2014). Identifying factors influencing the clergy and the church serving as safe haven to looters of state's treasury has become an anti-corruption priority and intervention to address the phenomenon (Usman, 1987; Kukah, 1993; Ojo, 2006). However, there is little evidence to suggest that religion, in terms of religious content, impacts upon individuals' attitudes to public morality in Nigeria (Odumosu, Olaniyi and Alonge, 2009; Nolte, Danjibo and Oladeji, 2009; Roberts, Odumosu, Nabofa, 2009).

While several studies have investigated the impact of religion on corruption in Nigeria (Orji, 2011; Adenugba and Omolawal, 2014; Okolo and Akpokighe, 2014; Iyanda, 2012; Oshewolo and Maren, 2015; Eyoh, 2015); also, while more academic focus is on religion as problem of corruption; little is known on how the clergy and the church stimulate corrupt practices in Nigeria. The clergy and the church are partly contributing to problem of corruption in Nigeria. Some of the church and the clergy, perpetually preach about forgiveness rather than revealing to 'Man', through their sermon, the punishment of engaging in corrupt practices. There is nothing wrong in forgiveness sermons, but the belief that one will always get or receive forgiveness for an offence committed against others, tends to make such person adamant and continue with such practices. This paper aims to advance the existing knowledge by investigating the contextual factors influencing the involvement of the clergy and the church in corrupt practices when they are supposed to be actively involved in preaching and orientating people to desist from corrupt practices. Amongst other characteristics of the context, the paper seeks to tease out the influence of such contextual factors on corruption. Understanding how actions of the clergy and church influenced people involvement in corrupt practices will guide the design of appropriate interventions aimed at checking and controlling the actions of the clergy and the church in Nigeria. Our understanding of factors that stimulate the church and the clergy's vulnerability to corruption is key to tackling corruption and ensuring political unity in Nigeria. Drawing on the theory of structural-functionalism, this paper explores the application of Machiavelli's idea of anti-church and anti-clergy but not anti-religion to tackling corruption in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Clarification

### Religion

This appealed to the selfishness of man through its doctrine of reward and punishment, thereby inducing proper behaviour and good conduct that was necessary for the well-being of a society. Religion determined the social and ethical norms and values that governed human conduct and actions (Machiavelli, cited in Sabine, 1973). Religion was considered good only if it produced order, for peace, brought forth fortune and success. The term religion refers to faith in a divinely created order of the world, agreement with which is the means of salvation for a community and thus for who has a role in that community. In this sense the term applies principally to such systems as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which involve faith in a creed, obedience to a moral code set down in sacred Scriptures, and participation in common practices (Adenugba and Omolawal, 2014).

Emile Durkheim sees religion as, "a unified system of beliefs and practices which unites into one moral community called church all those who adhere to them. While Karl Max defined religion as "the right of the oppressed creation, the heart of the heartless world and the soul of soulless condition. It is opium of the people (Gbadero, 2009). Moreover, Milton Yinger sees religion as "a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with ultimate problems of human life. It is the refusal to capitulate to death, to give up in the 'face of frustration, to allow hostility to tear apart one's human association" (Gbadero, 2009). And William James defined religion as, "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in' relation to whatever they may consider the divinely" (Okafor, 2011).

For this paper, religion is man's upright communication with God and his straight interaction with his neighbour. It is from this angle that religion is valued as the safeguard of morality, thus providing guidelines for human standards against which peoples' conduct can be evaluated. Religion here specifically refers to Islam and Christianity, which are the two major religions in Nigeria. But for this paper, Christianity is considered our major focus.

### Corruption

The concept "Corruption" like many other concepts in social sciences has no settled meaning. This means that there is no straight-backed definition, or generally accepted, or encompassing definition for the term corruption. However, certain definitional attempts have been proffered by different scholars. Although, there is often difficulties in defining it, because it means not only different things to different people, and even to the same people different things at different times, but also sanctions usually are attached to corrupt practices which hides them and gives them subtle forms. Thus, some people see "corruption" as a conscious and well-planned act by a person or group of persons to appropriate by unlawful means the wealth of another person or group of persons. Then to others, it is the act of turning power and authority to ready cash (Okolo and Akpokighe, 2014).

In a simple sense corruption is a deliberate act against an established rule or standard. It means to destroy the purity of something (Adenugba and Omolawal, 2014). The Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) defines corruption as including bribery, fraud and other related offences (Corrupt Practices Act 2000). World Bank sees corruption as 'the abuse of public office for private gains. It involves the seeking or exacting of a promise or receipt of a gift or any other advantage by a public servant in consideration for the performance or omission of an act, in violation of duties required of the office. It may also involve extortion of monies or theft by public servants of amounts due or payable to public coffers' (cited in Adenugba and Omolawal, 2014). Similarly, Ikeanyibe and Imhanlahimi (2006) had defined corruption as an antithesis to ethics and accountability. They adduced a few reasons for the precarious situation of corruption in Nigeria among which are ineffective institutions, weak rule of law, low popular participation in politics, weak protection of civil liberties, closed economic and political systems, poor remuneration of public servants.

According to (Salisu, 2000), the simple definition of corruption is that it is the misapplication of public resources to private ends. For example, public Officials may collect bribes for issuing Passports or Visa, for providing goods at sea/airport for awarding contracts or artificial scarcity. (Konie, 2003) identified two types of corruption, these are, Vertical corruption, which involves managers and decision makers. This is common in

less developed countries and; Horizontal corruption, which involves the entire Officials, informed and laymen groups in the countries. The two types of corruption should be seriously addressed and eradicated if any meaningful economic or political progress is to be made (Okolo and Akpokighe, 2014). For Agbese, (1982) corruption is:

When we use our position in society to secure certain advantages jumping a queue, being waved off at the checkpoint or making others bend the rules to accommodate our demands ... by whatever means even if it is just 'thank you' our action however innocent, however well-intentional, however unthreatening to others, has corrupted a system or a convention or some rules and regulations in application.

The foregoing aptly corroborates Machiavelli's views on the meaning of corruption. Machiavelli sees it as subordination of public values to the private sphere or/and when the public sphere was used for furthering private aims and interests. Machiavelli also sees it as licence, violence, great inequities in wealth and power, lack of peace and justice, disorderly ambition and growth, lawlessness, dishonesty and contempt for religion. In his view, corrupt societies exclude common people from playing an active role in government and political life. This view is consistent with that of Transparency International (TI), (2008) which sees corruption as the misuse of entrusted power for private gains. TI went further to differentiate between "according to the rules" Corruption and "against the rule" Corruption. Facilitation payments where a bribe is paid to receive preferential treatment for something that the bribe receiver is required to do by law, constitute the former. The latter on the other hand is a bribe paid to obtain services the bribe receiver is prohibited from providing. For Agbaje (2004) who sees corruption from the perspective of public service listed such factors as pervasion of public rules and misuse of official power for selfish motive, and the frustration of electoral process to make free and fair election impossible. Other forms of corruption to him are the deliberate refusal to declare one's assets on the assumption and expiration of public office and of course using one's official status to prevent the administration of justice which is common by the executives (past and present) of different capacities in Nigeria.

It is imperative to note from the foregoing definitional analysis, that corruption is like a virus that can cause total breakdown and demise of an organization and in relation to society it affects the economic, religious, social, political and the moral aspect of the society.

### **Causes of Corruption**

Academic researches (like Salisu, 2000; Konie, 2003; Stople, 2008; Grunner, 1999; Ojaide, 2000, etc.), have shown that there are different reasons why people engaged in corrupt practices. In Nigeria, many reasons have been put forward as probable causes for the prevalence of corruption. This ranges from non-conformity to religious tenets, imparted values and ideas and ideas alien to our culture, ethnicity which encourages favouritism and nepotism, a weak legal system which is honoured in the breach than observance (Okolo and Akpokighe, 2014).

The political bureau in its report mentioned such causes as excessive materialism generated by our individual capitalist order which emphasize personal wealth without regard to the collective interest and welfare of the larger society. Other causes of poverty, illiteracy, get-rich- mania, statism, and wrong attitude to public property, absence of a welfare scheme which cushions effect of unemployment, retirement, large families, and quest for power, double standards and low level of patriotism. These are important in themselves; it does appear that poverty is the most important single factor that promotes the wide spread of giving and taking bribes i.e. illegal financial inducements in the country (Okolo and Akpokighe, 2014). In addition to causes of corruption above, other causes include:

- a) Giving and receiving bribes
- b) Inflation of contracts
- c) Kick back and payment upfront

- d) Abuse of public property
- e) Lodging government fund in private accounts
- f) Examination malpractices
- g) Adulterated food or hazardous drugs
- h) Misappropriation and embezzlement of fund
- i) Money laundry by public officers
- j) Using proxy names to buy property.

Buttressing the above causes of corruption, Adenugba and Omolawal (2014) averred that causes of corruption includes ineffective institutions, weak rule of law, low popular participation in politics, weak protection of civil liberties, closed economic and political systems and poor remuneration of public servants. This view had aptly been supported by Machiavelli who attributed the cause of corruption to quest for luxurious habits and greed. Similarly, Onongha (2007) reported by Iyanda (2012) described greed as an inappropriate attitude toward things of values built on the mistaken judgment that my well-being is tied to the sum of my possession. Greed, he continues can take the form of acquisitiveness being inordinately concerned with amassing goods.

Corruption is a habit thing; it is an attitude of doing things wrongly at all time. It is majorly caused by innate greed in human beings. From the religious perspective, corruption means acting contrary to an established standard of religious doctrines. For instance, a clergy is supposed to preach the word of God without addition and subtraction. But if a clergy does otherwise, he is a corrupt person. Clergies are custodian of God's words, they are to strictly adhere to it and not to manipulate it, but when they use their position as a clergy, to protect corrupt persons in the society instead of rebuking them or use their church as safe haven for all manners of corrupt people in the society. Then clergies and churches are part of the causes of corruption in Nigeria. Evidence in the literature has shown that clergies in Nigeria have not fared better than politicians when it comes to corruption. Some of them (Clergies) have completely abandoned Godly doctrines to selfish ones in a bid to accumulate wealth and get rich quick. This ugly scenario has caused more harm to the country than good. Some clergies and churches have dishonestly manipulated religious doctrines to cause division in the country than unity.

From the forgoing, it can be reasonably deduced that corruption is not only caused by poverty, greed, institutional failure, system breakdown, illiteracy, wrong attitude etc. It is also caused by the immoral actions of clergies and churches. Many studies have blamed religion, but religion in itself does not corrupt people, it is the key players Clergy and Church that have misrepresented what religion stands for. And this has adversely affected the society at large.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper adopts structural-functionalism to explain how actions of the Clergy and the Church have made more Nigerians corrupt and how they can eradicate corruption in Nigeria. This theory holds the view that in any political society, there are structures or institutions that perform certain defined functions. For instance, these structures or institutions can be political, social, cultural or religious. But for this paper, emphasis will be placed on the religious structures. Just like the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), which is charged with the responsibilities of addressing corruption issues, the church is an institution that perform functions like ensuring proper behaviour and good conduct that was necessary for the wellbeing of the society through Godly sermons from the Bible. The church through the clergy teaches people to be of good conduct, display high moral standards and qualities in public life. The church in its functions, preaches to the world the importance of public interests over private interests. Since public interests/spirit is crucial to stability of the state. Prominent scholars of this theory are Almond and Powel (1966), who opined that a political system consists of structures, and for development to be experienced, the structures must function well. But if these structures failed to perform their functions effectively and efficiently, the entire political system or society will be collapse or disunited. The church and the clergy operate within the society and they are structures with

unique functions such as the production of men of honour, integrity, honest and corrupt free persons that will leave an exemplary life in the society. Besides, the church as an institution is expected to be a custodian of truth, justice and fairness and not of bias, greed and protection of corrupt persons in the society. Applying this theory to the subject matter, observations and evidence from literature have shown that clergies and churches in Nigeria have abandoned their functions for excessive wealth accumulation. The church and the clergy instead of chastising members/people who are corrupt, they shield them. The case of Pastor Chris Oyakilomen, who gave Agada, a commendation letter after paying as Tithe, a large shrunk of the 39 million, he stole from Sheraton Hotels and Towers, (Falaye, 2013), when he ought to have queried the source of such Tithe. This accounts for why there are duplication of churches in Nigeria. This is not to say that there are no churches or clergies that practice doctrines deeply rooted in Godly teachings and practical Christian life or upright in Nigeria. But literature is awash with higher rate of churches and clergies that indulge in corrupt practices. Corrupt people in Nigeria tend to seek refuge in churches and confide in corrupt clergies, this is because some churches and clergies have soiled their hands with corruption.

Corruption is a social problem that can be reduced if churches and clergies perform their functions effectively and efficiently. This can be by way of adopting the doctrine of rewards and punishment. This will help inform and admonish people of the consequences of their actions. This will in the long run appealed to their selfishness and corrupt attitude. The theory holds the view that if these structures (churches and clergies) perform their functions as expected, the society will be stable and progressive. Therefore, if churches and clergies perform their religious functions as expected in terms of exposing corrupt members, rejecting illicit donations, asking members questions on sources of their wealth, disciplining any members caught in the act of corruption publicly, as well as telling the politicians the truth about good governance, corruption will be reduced in Nigeria.

### **Machiavelli's Idea of Anti-church, Anti-clergy but not Anti-Religion and Corruption**

Machiavelli was anti-church and anti-clergy, but not anti-religion. This means that in the view of Machiavelli, the church and the clergy but not the religion are the cause of corruption in a society. He holds the view that the church and clergy make men effeminate, charitable and weak, glorifying qualities like renunciation, humility, lowliness, other-worldliness, asceticism, charity and patience under injustice. The clergy and the church are expected to instil fear for committing corruption and respect for authority in people. Also, they are expected to provide moral inspiration and continually explore doctrines that will mould the behaviour of people in the society. But the church and its clergy have contributed partly to the ruin of the society through its doctrines of prosperity and worldly affections.

Machiavelli believes that religion does not corrupt a man, but it is necessary for man's social life and for the health and prosperity of the state. He notes that the religion is important within the state because of the influence it wielded over political life in general. Though an indispensable part of civic life, it was never an end in itself. As a political tool, princes and rulers were to use religion in their power struggles effectively, but responsibly and cautiously, otherwise it could be disastrous. To Machiavelli, religion determined the social and ethical norms and values that governed human conduct and actions. He also holds the view that religion is a tool that propels the display of high moral standards, discipline and qualities in public life. It does not teach people how to steal in public office, but religion promotes public interests of the society over personal gains or interests. He was however of the view that public spirit is crucial to stability, progress and development of the state. And argued that one of the determinants of public spirit is religion and liberty. He advised the ruler or the government to do anything and everything possible to cultivate belief in religion, even if the ruler in his personal capacity was irreligious or had little faith in religion.

He frowned at the church and clergy for misrepresenting religious doctrines. He sees the Church and Clergy as the main perpetrators of injustice in the society. He blamed the doctrine of confessing to fellow 'Man' in a bid to receive forgiveness, anytime a man engages in actions against the public spirit/interest of the state. He argued that Man will always want to be corrupt and engage in immoral actions because of the belief that he will get forgiveness from the 'Father'(clergy) during confession. This to Machiavelli is the highest level of injustice in any society. The clergy and the church have failed to instil fear and respect for constituted authority in people. Machiavelli blamed the church for being too inward looking, individualistic and concerned with the need to

tend one's soul. Concerning the church, Machiavelli preferred two main charges. First, he states that the Italians have become 'irreligious and bad' because of the evil example of the court of Rome'. The second and more serious accusation is that the church 'has kept and still keeps our country divided'. He goes on to say that the sole cause of Italian political disunity is the church. Having acquired jurisdiction over a considerable portion of Italy "she has never had sufficient power or courage to enable her to make herself sole sovereign of all Italy". He dismissed the Christian view that an individual was endowed with a divine element and a supernatural end. He also rejected the idea of absolute good. He observed: Goodness is simply that which sub serves on the average or in the long run, the interests of the mass of individuals. The terms good and evil have no transcendental reference. They refer to the community considered as an association of individuals and to nothing else.

Though Machiavelli was critical of Christianity, he retained the basic Christian views on the differences between good and evil. For instance, he regarded murdering one's co-citizens, betraying one's friends, disloyalty and irreligiousness as lack of virtue not entitled to glory. Machiavelli was clear that Italy needed a religion similar to one that ancient Roman had, a religion that taught to serve the interest of the state. He was categorical that Florentines needed political and military virtues which Christian faith did not impart. Machiavelli's attitude to religion and morality made him highly controversial. Strauss characterized him as a teacher of evil. Prof. Sabine saw him as being amoral. It is beyond dispute that Machiavelli separated religion from politics and set the tone for one of the main themes of modern times, namely secularization of thought and life. Though conscious of the importance of religion as a cementing force in society, he was hostile towards Christianity and looked upon the Roman Catholic Church as the main adversary.

Corruption, Machiavelli, meant licence, violence, great inequities in wealth and power, lack of peace and justice, disorderly ambition and growth, lawlessness, dishonesty and contempt for religion. It means subordination of public values to the private sphere or/ and when the public sphere was used for furthering private aims and interests. The cause of corruption is wealth without worth. He argued that there is a strong link between luxurious habits and moral decline. He sees corrupt societies as those that exclude common people from government. To him, corruption is caused by the actions of the clergy and church. Since religion does not corrupt people, it is the clergy and the church according to Machiavelli, through their doctrine or actions that teaches Men in the society to be corrupt. He asked questions like how would a Man not be corrupt or continually be engaged in immoral actions when he knows he will be forgiven as soon as he confessed his sins to a 'Father'? He was of the opinion that religion makes Men to be weak, docile and worldly. Corruption is prevalent because the clergy and the church have failed to show the people consequences of their immoral actions. He argued that if every church or clergy continually deploy or practice the doctrine of rewards and punishment, which reward a man for doing good and punishes for doing evil, corruption will have end in most state.

Corruption, in the view of Machiavelli can be tackled only with extraordinary measures, like rule by a strong will ruler or prince with overwhelming powers. Machiavelli was convinced that a corrupt people could not achieve nor maintain free politics, for they would be unable to distinguish between subjective private interests and the public domain. They lacked the inner strength to prevent those in power from advancing their private interests, as they themselves if given the opportunity, would use the political sphere for the pursuit of their private interests (Shumer, 1979). They would appropriate state for themselves.

Machiavelli advocated for a measure of public virtue as a common ideal and goal for the entire polity, faith in the system and in persons whom the people trusted were fundamental prerequisites for not only ending corruption, but also in making a beginning for the real development of the individual. Civic virtues in a ruler were martial qualities needed to defend the state against internal disunity. In an individual, it means public-spiritedness and patriotism necessary for ensuring freedom and deterring corruption or tyranny.

### **The Church and Clergy as safe haven to Corrupt Persons in Nigeria**

It is imperative to showcase evidence of notable Nigerians who were jailed for being corrupt and squandering public fund, but were gracefully welcomed by their church and clergy. The case of Chief Bode George, former chairman of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) who was jailed for looting public fund in Nigeria Port Authority,

confirmed this assertion. Beside this, James Ibori, former Delta state governor was celebrated not only by his church but by clergies in the church after serving jail term in London. These churches practically welcomed these corrupt persons in grand style making them feel that they have not done anything wrong. Late Alamiyeseigha Dieprieve former Bayelsa governor, apart from being celebrated by his people when he escaped from London, he gave thanksgiving in church and a clergy conducted the sermon that day. This evidently shows that the problem is not religion, but the clergy and church. The clergy and church hide under religion to perpetuate this act. There is nothing wrong in going to church to worship or give thanksgiving by anybody whether corrupt or not, but it becomes a problem when the clergy or church remain silent or close their eyes against corruption. If churches are critical about fighting corruption, they must always speak against it in their church to discourage corrupt people from seeking protection in church.

During election period, politicians, including the corrupt ones, see church as best place to campaign for votes. Big churches with large worshippers are the target of politicians during election. This view was expressed in the submission of Kuka (1993) who avers that it has been observed that politicians openly espouse religious sectarian sentiments in campaigning for public support. In addition, it was observed that "no one can aspire to, or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious" (Kukah, 1993). This explains the reason why some clergies always welcome corrupt people in their church. Corruption flourishes in Nigeria today; it is endemic from cradle to grave. It is noticeable in homes, markets, government offices, private organizations and even in the churches" (Adebiyi, 2012). In a similar vein, Rapheal (2014) aptly argues that:

Today, people who carry the name of God or claim to act or represent God seems not to live by what they claim to be. Evils acts are being perpetrated among the so-called clergy men. And the major concern of many now is, "who really can be trusted in our society now?" Both in the church and also in the mosque now, there is high level of hypocrisy and deception; atrocities everywhere, both on the pulpit and in the pew. What becomes the major trend in the religious circle in Nigeria today is that, many claimed to be called of God, but in the real sense of the matter, behind their actions lies poverty, unemployment, quest for money, materialism and fame (p.177).

Similarly, Makinde cited in Rapheal (2014), in his bid to explain how churches and clergies have served as safe haven to corrupt people avers that:

Are they churches or commercial churches? Let's qualify them. What has brought that is unemployment. Immediately people are unemployed, they float their own churches, claiming that God has called them. We still need to evangelise in Nigeria, but beware of false prophets using the name of God to work miracles under black magic. There are genuine pastors; by their fruits you will know them (Makinde, 2007).

From the foregoing discussion it can be deduced that churches and clergies are not spared from corruption. Evidence has shown that some churches and clergy men indulge in it through unholy welcome of corrupt people in their church, celebration and protection of corrupt people or politicians in their church. Many corrupt people, especially politicians and public office holders have donated stolen public funds in churches as tithes and offering. Some clergy men have openly received stolen money, cars and other gifts from corrupt persons in the society without verifying the source of the money. It is imperative to note that the fact that there are some honest, God-fearing clergies and upright churches is not lost, but it seems that the trend of events in our society today shows a greater proportion on the side of the falsehood than the real ones.

### **Applying Machiavellian Approach to Control Corruption in Nigeria**

Evidence from review of Machiavelli's work on corruption, shows that just like in the old Roman Empire, some clergies and churches in Nigeria have not fared better in the fight against corruption. In Nigeria, religious doctrines have been manipulated to sooth selfish interests of some clergies and their corrupt allies in the society. In some instances, churches and clergies just like Machiavelli had noted tend to disunite or divide the state



because of excessive emphasis on self, individualistic and private interests. This view corroborates that of Onaiyekan (2010) who notes that:

Any casual look at our country obviously shows the all-pervading presence of religion. We only need to note, for example, the number of places of worship, the volume of holy noises that are emitted everywhere, the array of religious leaders with various titles and robes and the fervor with which we not only practice our faith but at times violently confront one another. Some are wondering whether our reputation as a religious nation is something to be proud of. They suspected that there is something dubious about this record.

The foregoing, however confirms the view of Machiavelli about the actions of clergies and churches in Nigeria. Obviously, the situation of things in Nigeria seems contrary to what the manifest function of religion is supposed to be in any given society where religion is practice like Nigeria (Rapheal, 2014). This view was aptly echoed when Odumuyiwa (2002) unequivocally asserts that, "Nigeria is a religious but criminal society".

Churches in Nigeria have failed to instil the fear to do evil or indulge in corrupt and immoral attitude in the people. According to Machiavelli, the church and the clergy have also failed to instil the public spirit of respect to authority in the people. While some clergies have incited their members to take up arms and ammunitions to protect themselves, others have openly indoctrinated their members to steal while in public office through their sermon of prosperity and wealth accumulation. Isiramen (2010) in a similar vein, had reported the bad situation of actions of clergies and churches in Nigeria. He averred that:

The bane of the Nigerian society today is the relegation of religious issues to the churches, the mosques and traditional abode. The nation appears to be sliding into doldrums. There is no doubt that the naive conception of civilization based on technological and scientific feats has intensified the problems attributable to civic and moral breakdown. The result is the loss of personal dignity and community sensitivity culminating in depraved behaviours.

From the above assertion it can be deduced that, there is a connection between religion or religiosity and its outcomes in terms of individual attitudes and behaviour, and how it can in turn, have an enduring implication on the societal development and transformation. In the Nigeria's case, the clergies have misrepresented what religion stands for and this in turn, has bad implication for the behaviour of people in the society. This, raises the question of how then can corruption be checked or controlled in Nigeria using Machiavelli's approach? For Machiavelli corruption can be checked through a strong will ruler with powers of the people supporting him. In Nigeria, corruption persists not because there are no anti-corruption agencies or institutions but because there is no strong will ruler or heads of institutions in Nigeria. Most leaders and heads of institutions in Nigeria device loud-mouthed anti-corruption agencies to fight corruption, but evidence in the literature has shown that these leaders or heads have only resorted to selective fight against corruption.

The case of President Obasanjo who used the EFCC to hunt down corrupt persons in opposition party is readily at hand. Fighting few selected corrupt persons using anti-corruption agencies will not end corruption rather, it will escalate it. In Nigeria, we don't have strong institutions that can outlive heads of those institutions and successive persons in government. We tend to praise people at the helms of affairs of government institutions (for instance, Ribadu, Magu etc.) without strengthening the institutions, to effectively fight corruption, and when these people leave the office, the institutions become very weak. This has partly contributed to the thriving of corruption in Nigeria.

Applying Machiavelli's idea to eradicating corruption in Nigeria, there is need to have a strong will President in government. President Buhari has fairly exhibited strong political will in the fight against corruption. His political will and the overwhelming supports and powers given to him by the people have made him different from other Nigerian Presidents. This in itself does not completely exempt his administration from corruption.

Under his administration, several bold steps have been taken to eradicate corruption. Such steps include implementing inherited policies of Treasury Single Account (TSA), Integrated Personnel Payroll System (IPPS), Bank Verification Number (BVN) to fight corruption, establishment of whistle blower's policy to raise alarm of corrupt practices in the country.

Though, these policies yielded some positive results in terms of recovery of some stolen funds. The case of former chairman of Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) who was caught with large sum of money, hidden in one of his houses in Kano State (see National Dailies of the time), the money recovered in Ikoyi mansion and many other stolen funds recovered from several places. Also, the prosecution and sentencing of some corrupt politicians and judges to prison (Yero of Kaduna State, Jolly Nyame of Taraba State, Dariye of Plateau State etc), were based on the conviction that Buhari is a strong will President, bent on fighting corruption, but this should be done within the confine of law, otherwise, it will be termed as being dictatorial and unlawful.

Beside strong will, Machiavelli noted public virtue, common good and goal as against private virtue, faith in the system and trust of the person in government as remedies for corruption. This means that clergies and churches must preach messages that promote one Nigeria, common good and goal rather than divisive sermons. Clergies must desist from inciting their members (Christians) against other people from other religion. Nigerians must show faith in the government and its programme. For instance, Nigerians must have faith in government's efforts against corruption. Specifically, people must have faith in the EFCC and ICPC in their efforts against corruption.

The church and the clergy should not give refuge to looters of public treasury, rather according to Machiavelli, they should use whatever means (sermons, public denouncement, criticism, mobilization, demonstration etc., to expose them and make them accountable to the people. This will go a long way to discourage people from looting state's treasury to deposit as tithes and offerings or donations in churches, it will also make politicians to be focus on service delivery and good governance.

## **CONCLUSION**

The article contends that religion does not corrupt persons, but its key players, the Church and the Clergy are the main perpetrators of corruption according to Machiavelli in any country, including Nigeria. This is evidently seen in Nigeria, as some churches and clergies have manipulated religious doctrines for self-glorification and personal aggrandisement, leading to large scale of corruption which in turn adversely affects the society. It is the contention of this article that corruption abounds in Nigeria because church as a religious institution has failed in its responsibilities to instil fear in its members not to commit corruption and immoral acts. In fact, it was also found that church instead of rebuking bad behaviour and corrupt persons they provide with refuge and serve as safe haven to looters of state's treasury who in turn lodge the stolen funds in churches as donations, tithes and offering.

The paper suggests that the display of strong 'political will' as predicted by Machiavelli is the will of government against corruption is partly the remedy for tackling corruption in Nigeria. Leaders particularly the President must show a strong will to fight the dreaded menace that have ravaged the entity called Nigeria. It is obvious that financial crime agencies (such as ICPC, EFCC) are too weak to fight corruption in Nigeria. Their weakness is partly connected to the politicization of their functions and overbearing influence of the president. For example, the appointment of the chairmen of these agencies is done by the president, this in itself, is an unhealthy practice laden with corruption. It has severe implications for the independence of these agencies, as their fight against economic and financial crimes hardly cover those perpetrated by politicians from APC.

The case at hand, is the inability of EFCC to arrest and prosecute former governor of Kogi State, Yahaya Bello over financial crimes committed while he was the governor of the state. The EFCC has been criticised for its inability to arrest corrupt politicians in the same party as the president and this has continued to undermined performance of the current government. Like Machiavelli suggested, a state (government) need to deploy its coercive force to cleanse the society of all forms of corruption, including those carried out by clergies and in

churches. Thus, with strong political will, especially from political functionaries, especially the president of the country, corruption is likely to be reduced in Nigeria.

Strong political will does not indulge in selective justice or the fight against corruption. In fact, strong political will exposes corrupt party members or followers and does not receive corrupt defected politicians from other parties. Evidences abound to show that under Buhari's administration, the fight against corruption is not total but selective and highly exclusive. For instance, the case of Godswill Akpabio who has many corrupt cases hanging around his neck but defected to All Progressive Congress and elected as the Senate President, further confirmed the fact that President Tinubu 's strategy of fighting corruption is selective and non-effective.

Besides, the involvement of the people and the collective fight against corruption by way of whistle blowing will largely check corrupt practices of some churches and clergies in Nigeria. In addition to this, all Nigerians must pursue public good and not private good, for public good ensures stability and progress of the state.

Finally, just like Machiavelli has suggested, everything lies on the strong will of the ruler. President Tinubu represents the ruler in Nigeria, though he has displayed some levels of strong political will in the fight against corruption, a feat, previous Presidents/rulers in Nigeria strive to achieve. President Tinubu, in order not to be like his other predecessors, must look inward into his party, All Progressive Congress, its cabinet, to weed out corrupt people. His political will, will further aggravates corrupt practices if it is only bent at fighting corrupt persons in opposition parties and covering those in his party.

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