

## **The Perception of the Church on Corruption: A Case Study of Good Shepherd Africa Gospel Church, Nairobi - Kenya**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The subject of corruption in political leadership and the church's involvement is the most complex in Kenya, it is always emotive to discuss. Corruption has been described as one of the greatest evils of this generation, and the enemy of economic and social development. The purpose of this study was to find out the perception of the church on corruption in political leadership and the church's response to the situation. The researcher sought to find out how Christians perceive and talk about corruption, their position and in which ways they have experienced corruption, whether they feel mandated to speak against it or are intimidated. The researcher used a qualitative methodology with in-depth questionnaires; interviews were conducted for data collection. The study findings revealed that the church is aware of corruption in political leadership, but no evidence showed the church's efforts in responding to the situation. The Church has to consider her calling and responsibility in challenging the government on the issue of corruption. Failing to do so may raise questions whether the church is also corrupted or not faithful to her mission. The Church as the voice of God in society has the mandate to resist any opposition to development and peace of any society caused by the corruption of whatever forms, speaking on behalf of vulnerable people, especially those who are oppressed without justice. There is a need for the Church to consider discipleship as the key focus to help believers fully understand how to deal with the issue of corruption in their daily lives.

Keywords: Corruption, Church, leadership, the Word of God, discipleship, prayer

### **Introduction**

Kenya's economy suffers from the colonial and post-colonial periods. In colonialism, land and territory were acquired illegally and by force. Kenyans experienced European corruption when colonials made contact with Africa; for this reason, the law against corruption was established in the colonial period. In the colonial era, people were manipulated by their race and tribe for the colonial government's benefits (Kibwana et al., 1996, p. 10).

In most corrupt countries, the economic system is driven so that individuals get the profits. The system does not favor all citizens to benefit from the country's economy. Corruption affects all areas of society, though there are many causes leading to it. Moral depravity and greed are the major causes of corruption; as Nkansah and Julius point out, corruption is the result of sin in a human's heart (2021). Because of that, poverty and a hard life make society living without hope for present and future. As Chinua Achebe (2005) says, that without doubt corruption has permeated African society, and this reality cannot be denied the fact that it is in every corner of the continent. It undermines the economy and development and leads to other crises like terrorism.

During president Moi's leadership, his office was not exempt from scandals, although the president repeatedly called for the end of corruption. He praised those who reported corruption cases but failed to take action. For example, he failed to act on the Goldenberg scandal and other corruption scandals (Kibwana et al., 1996, pp. 42–43). According to Kibwana, those in positions of leadership over time have been compromised in the fight against corruption, and this leads to the growth of corrupt acts from the public sectors and citizens as well.

Paul Gifford criticizes the church for not participating in Kenyan's socio-political development including the case of corruption (Gifford, 2009, pp. 243–244). This study aimed to support Gifford's interpretation of the role of the church in public domains, by examining the perception of the Church in Nairobi on the issue of corruption in the political leadership of Nairobi County.

History shows that corruption is an old phenomenon, hence as old as the creation, and civilization as the Bible points out from Genesis, 6:12-13:

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. <sup>12</sup> God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. <sup>13</sup> So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth".

In Exodus 23:8, The Lord commanded Moses to tell his people Israel "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous", and according to Proverbs 17:8, "A bribe is a charm to one who gives it; wherever he turns he succeeds". From the few biblical quotations, one can notice that the issue of corruption is not something new on earth.

### **Corruption in the Kenyan Context**

On the first day of President Kibaki's term in parliament on February 18, 2003, he stated, "Corruption is a serious problem Kenya is struggling with. It has tarnished our reputations as Kenyan leaders, as a leader I intend to lead for a change. (AfriMAP, 2016) During his annual address to parliament on March 27, 2014, president Uhuru Kenyatta stated, "It remains a hard truth that some of our public services are rife with waste and corruption" (AfriMAP, 2016). Unfortunately, down the line, nothing has changed from these governments to free the country from corruption.

The act of corruption can be seen in public institutions and its result harms the citizens; most election violence is believed to be caused by corruption. For example, the violence following the election of 2007 in Kenya was attributed by politicians because of the public's perception that the judiciary failed to provide the solution to the election disputes as a result of corrupt systems. On this concern, Wrong's view is that corruption is prevalent in Kenya (as in most African countries) as a result of ethnic cabals who believe that "it is our turn to eat" when they come to power (2009).

Different definitions of corruption seem to have a relation with the biblical view; nevertheless, corruption continues to grow from one generation to the other, no men are above or beyond corruption, whether educated or not. Most leaders when they come to

power, hide their corrupt practices through their relatives or friends, so sometimes it may be hard to notice them. The Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Act (Chapter 65 of the Laws of Kenya), defines corruption as bribery, fraud, abuse of the office, breach of trust, or an offense involving dishonesty which has to do with taxes, rates, or impost any levies under any act, furthermore, it is a misappropriation of public funds. The Transparency International (TI) defines corruption as the “abuse of the entrusted power for personal gain” (2003).

According to a World Bank report, when the Kenyan government rolled out the 2010 constitution, the local government and citizens were expected to participate more actively in governance than ever before. It was expected from the new constitution that “governance system out to give powers of self-governance to the people” but also to “recognize the rights of communities to manage their affairs, and to further their development”, still the new system did not target to have measures to solve the problem of corruption (2020, p. 186).

Kibwana points out that the independent constitution structure provided an important environment for fighting corruption. The literature revealed that corruption was not a key problem in the early years of independence. But thereafter the amendment was done to the constitution and ordinary law which brought down the constitutional power to ensure democratic, accountability, and transparency in the government (1996, p. 154). The Ethics Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) asserted that “Kenya has had anti-corruption legislation since 1956. And the Prevention of Corruption Act was in operation from 1956 to 2003 when the Anti-corruption and the Economic Crimes Acts no. 3 of 2003, and it became operational and it was repealed” (2021).

The constitutional structure must give citizens the power to question the government officials on the stolen public funds. Some citizens argue that comparing to other anti-social criminal conduct, corruption seems not to be an offense in the courts of law of Kenya, most government officials are found guilty in corruption act, cases of corruption are not treated seriously like other criminal cases.

### **Church and Politics**

The Church is to reach out to politicians with the gospel of Christ to preach and teach about the truth, helping them to understand how evil actions damage society. If the church’s teaching does not touch the hearts of man, it is clear that indicates that the church does not stand faithful as the voice of God. If the church is to be the prophetic voice of God in society, God has to be at the center of the culture and law of that society. By this I mean that God has to be at the center of all that the church is doing in the nation.

God has designed the church to take the gospel of justice in every society, but when the church is not teaching justice, it is an indicator that the church is not faithful to the calling. When the Bible says to pray for those in leadership (1 Timothy 2:1-2), the church needs to pray and speak, because those in leadership are fallen human beings. The only way one comes out of an ethical issue is through salvation, and the Word of God can change the heart of every sinner.

The Church, as the hope of society not only in the spiritual dimension but also in the development aspect, has a responsibility to be involved in matters that affect people’s lives, when the government's institutions fail to lead to in justice. In the view of politics and governance concerning Christianity, the Bible shows the relationship between the Church and the political leadership as one that goes hand in hand.

In the Old Testament, prophets like Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Nathan responded as God's messengers and the voice of the oppressed to bring change in the leadership of the day. Church leaders in Kenya have played a significant role to challenge the government officials in various ways, including the government system in forming political parties. For example, Archbishops of the Anglican and Catholic Church - Muge, Okullu, Gitari, Fr. Josiah Muthee, John Obala, Cardinal Njue, Martin Kivuva and many more - have challenged the government, but in the current political structure, the Church remains silent, while structures open doors to corruption (Gifford 2009, p. 215).

Kenga asserts that multiple religious systems had influenced the politics of the pre-colonial era. During this time, political rulers and community leaders were considered God's representatives (Kenga, 2016, p. 3). Because of the challenge of corruption in Kenya, the critical question posed to respondents was: what is the role of the church, particularly Good Shepherd AGC, and other denominations in the fight against corruption? According to Magezi, "The church must be the link and bridge in society," and he adds that, "As a sub-system of society, the church should explore ways of working in the public sphere to address some of the issues that affect society, such as corruption" (Magezi, 2016, p. 2). The church as God's representative in society has the mandate to confront the government for the betterment of Christians and society as a whole.

According to Kenya National Bureau of Statistics the church has the majority of the Kenyan population (2020), therefore it must endeavor to be socially aware of the issue of corruption, and truly guided by biblical principles on how to approach those in the position of leadership in this issue, the fact that the church is critical for the social and spiritual life of society. The Bible speaks of God's justice, and the church must seek to model the justice through social ethics informed by the biblical doctrine through teaching, praying, and critique of those entrusted with political positions. Christian leaders must seek the wisdom of God and the social imperatives from a Christian perspective and speak a language that helps those in power to understand the issue.

### **The Problem of Ethnicity in Fighting Corruption**

The issue of ethnicity affects even the church in Kenya. The increase of corruption in government institutions, even the use of church properties, as a political platform as long as the political leader is known to the church clergy. Ethnicity/tribalism and nepotism have contributed to the spread of corruption and lead to zero tolerance to those involved, such as economic mismanagement by appointing under-qualified or unqualified people to high leadership positions.

Under President Moi's administration, people from other tribes were being removed from the strategic political and economic positions, replacing them with those of Moi's predominant tribe (Mulinge & Lesetedi, 1998). It is evident that tribalism can be a significant threat in fighting corruption; when those involved are relatives to the top leadership, it is hard to confront them for their actions. Also, it brings division in the country because some people are more privileged than others. It is possible to think that Kenya's politics seems to belong to a particular group of people in power. The ethnic elites who organized the political support create political discrimination against people of other tribal groups. For someone to have an opportunity to get into a political position, the leading group has to be known. Therefore, that becomes the basis of corruption growth in Kenya (Kanyinga, 2014, p. 15).

The image of the church in the fight against corruption has shown that the church has failed the test on how to deal with the corruption issue in political leadership because of a negative ethnicity problem. If one is corrupted and he/she belongs to a certain ethnic group, the church feels ashamed to confront those individuals who belong to their own tribes; in another words, the church failed to stand solid when it comes to dealing with the issue of corruption in political leadership, it fails to stand according to the scriptures, or to confront the issue.

In Kenya's context of ethnic and political polarisation, the church as the prophets of modern time to the nation must stand as the advocate for national integration by modeling and promoting equity, fairness, justice based on biblical ethics. As politics is implied administration for people's well-being, and the welfare of society, therefore, the church should not be a spectator but rather be an active participant agent of change to ensure balance, justice, equity in the political and governmental process of Kenya. The participation of the church in politics is a result of being faithful to her calling, it needs a transformative agenda for society through its redemptive concern as God's instrument.

### **The Church's Failures in the Fight against Corruption**

The church is called to be Christ's ambassador for transformation, and the vessel for the renewal of people's hearts as they become "salt" and "light" of the world, though Christians are heavenly citizens after giving their lives to Jesus, while still here on earth, are expected to participate in encouraging and dealing with this act of corruption in every place they may be. According to Gifford, the Church has a broader role and responsibility to lead institutions in civil society. Still, there is very little evidence that it is doing what it is supposed to do (Gifford, 1995, p. 299). At some point, the Church has either supported the government authorities or remained neutral on corruption matters. Especially in a political and social-economic issue, this is due to the respect for some authorities who freely give their support to some churches' projects in the country (Gibbs et. al.1999, p.43).

The situation in Kenya raises many questions concerning the place of the church in politics. Political leaders are delegated leaders to lead the nation by God, this is because the Bible affirms that no leader comes to authority without God's approval (Rom. 13:1-2). In Kenya when it comes to Christians and the role they play in society, there is no clear evidence especially when it comes to corruption, as 80% identify themselves as Christians. It is clear that majority of these are nominal Christians.

From past and present political leadership, it is not something new for social justice in Kenya; the call is for the church to engage in the country's political affairs as a prophetic voice to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves who are oppressed in many ways. If the church is true to the Bible, then addressing corruption should not be an issue, it is either the church is compromising with the same issue or there is a lack of concern, and leadership capacity to engage these issues in an informed manner. Some church members pointed out that from January to December they have hardly heard a message from the pulpit that speaks or teaches on the issue of corruption. Therefore, there is a need for the church leadership to work on the love for money, lack of desire to participate in battling against the corrupt behaviors, and despite her shortcoming, there is still an opportunity to improve and rise to the occasion and take up the mandate of being the prophetic and transformative vessel of God to Kenyan society.

The correspondents were asked the questions: What has Good Shepherd AGC done to address corruption in Kenya? What has been the contribution of the Africa Gospel Church in the fight against corruption? What kind of training did the church undertake to help members to justify their role in dealing with this pandemic as Christians? In this paper, the author has suggested some important ways the church can participate in the fight against corruption.

### **Methodology**

This paper interprets the perception of the church of Nairobi on corruption in political leadership. From many churches in Nairobi County, the Good Shepherd Church was selected specifically to carry out this study. Like many other congregations, this local church has people who are working as civil servants, with the total population of this church being about 600 members, of whom 45 were interviewed.

Each person was given a questionnaire form to fill for the following categories: pastoral (5), local church council (17), or church members (23). Before meeting face to face and sending the questionnaire, the author was able to explain to the informants about the topic he was searching on. The ethnography interview was used to collect data that would highlight the perception of the church on corruption in the political leadership of Nairobi County, Kenya. After collecting data, it was transcribed, then recorded and saved with different file names which helped the author to carefully examine the data during coding topics, ideas, and approaches, as given by Mugenda (1999). These were used to do data analysis. The process involved: editing and cleaning up the transcribed material.

### **Result and Discussion**

Many argued that the church has not been able to live out its full mandate of being faithful to God's calling, for the Church's participation in society's affairs is at the heart of its God-given mandate of being "salt" and "light" (Matthew 5:13-16). The salt is valid if it is able not only to create a salty flavor element of the food but also if it can affect other flavors. The church as the salt in Kenyan society is not only called to be the instrument of salvation but rather also at a challenging time when Kenyans are politically, economically, and socially marginalized by the political class.

"Civil society cannot save a people from oppressive, unjust government, but neither can such governments be changed without the emergence of a sense of civic purpose and the ability of citizens to mobilize to reform or replace oppressive governments. For the latter to occur, people need to become literate, publicly engaged, and willing to act in the public interest" (Skillen, 2004).

The Church needs to be united speaking in one voice, when the church keeps quiet, teachers, medics, and other public servants suffer due to lack of payment and salaries and end up on the streets protesting this is a clear indicator that the church has truly failed. Yet, the church will still receive money again from politicians in the name of donations.

To understand the corruption in the Kenyan context the author probed the informants on their understanding of corruption and Christian responsibility in anti-corruption, their knowledge on what is the role of the church on corruption, different ways to deal with it in

society, and engagement in governmental institutions, and the impact of the church in society in dealing with corruption. Respondents stated that the state and the church have not done enough to eradicate the surge of corruption. The inadequacies are often attributed to the church because she influences politicians, as every election season, the church gives a platform to politicians for the campaign and yet fails to address the evil character of bribery.

If corruption is to be eradicated in this society, the fight must start somewhere and the church as an institution is in a better position to start it. The church is to approach those members who are government officials and advise them to be accountable to the public funds, giving a report with honesty on how they use every resource they are allocated for the benefit of all citizens.

### **Findings**

As the author sought to know the perception of the church on corruption in political leadership and the role or participation in anti-corruption. From the findings, almost eight percent of the informants said the church has not been involved in the act. They added that the church is compromised in some ways as it has neglected its mandate in society by not speaking the truth to those involved in the act of corruption. Because of donations to support church projects. Others asserted that the fact that the church is giving the pulpit to those individuals in the government to do the campaigns of false promises to society, is a clear sign that the church has been corrupted by politicians.

The church is aware of the rampant corruption in the political leadership, and some church members have testified how they have come across corrupt deals. The study found that the Good Shepherd church members' critical concern on corruption in the political leadership revealed that corruption has penetrated the entire government's system, it was perceived that it is not easy or possible to lead a corruption-free life in Kenya, the major contribution to corruption in Kenya is lax law enforcement and partiality to those who are found guilty of corrupt deals.

Most Kenyans are no longer shocked by occurrences of corruption from political elites, it has been there, every now and then incidents connected with the same people and nothing happens. In other words, citizens have lost hope with political leaders as the country is losing Billions of Kenya Shillings due to corruption without any action being taken. In discussion with some of the church members seeking to find out what the church has done to this issue, on a spiritual level corruption has to be considered as an issue that affects people's life.

From the above results, the church need to be more involved in what is going on in society, as it has a firm responsibility to advocate for those who are oppressed, as a prophetic voice, there is a need for the Church to present herself as the moral compass of society, and speak out loudly against any form of corruption in Kenya, and set a model standard to promote justice in society, doing this in God's given wisdom, love, compassion and self-less motive, guard itself against compromise from the gifts given by politicians.

The fight against corruption must stand from the Church arena, there is a need for transparency in the Church before going out there speaking to the political class. The Church leadership has failed to clean itself from corruption within. Therefore, there is no way the church can win the battle against corruption as long as it is corrupted in itself

### **Conclusion**

Since the church can be defined as the community of God's people and an advocate, and as a prophetic voice, it has to review her identity, enhancing the credibility of the Church to be like "a light shining in the darkness", the church must be beyond reproach. A renewal of the Church community is the only way to recover the dignity of society in Kenya. Faith in the God of Christianity is the way to restore the sanity of the behaviors in the political leadership.

The Church must first check on her character, there is no way one can correct someone's character without judging one's own, so when the church is compromised in society it is hard to stand and confront the moral life of the political leadership. The Church must get rid and distance itself from corruption to have the power and moral authority to confront the political class of the day. The pastoral team and the clergy need to work together by creating awareness of what is going on for every believer to feel that they are concerned as well, inviting every church member for Christian fellowship, setting special counseling sessions, calling for a Bible study, and discussing this issue every day.

There is an image in people's minds that the Church has lost its morality long time ago, hence there is a need for renewal of minds and spirits as they soldier forward in making the Church regain its rightful place in society. So those in Church leadership are to be encouraged to keep seeking and trusting God for change. The church needs to consider thinking seriously to have programs on spiritual warfare to train members in ways they can stand to the truth of God's word when they encounter any temptation on corruption. Some of those in political leadership are church members, the church leadership must ensure they have a place in their lives to speak with authority on what is not right, and this will only be possible if the clergy gives room for them to feel free not being judged.

### **Recommendations**

The church both leaders and members must know in which ways they should approach political class on their acts and must speak even when they may not be appreciated by all. The church leaders should sympathize with those who are oppressed and defend them. In this way, it must support the judiciary if it stands for what is right, even though there is corruption in the judiciary, it is an important institution in fighting corruption.

The church (both leaders and members) has to consider her calling and responsibility in challenging the government on the issue of corruption, failing to do this, it is accountable to God, and this will lead this country away in a very wrong direction. The church leadership must not give the pulpit to the corrupt leaders during Sunday services or funerals.

The preaching and teaching on the pulpit have to help church membership properly understand their role in the government in times of fighting against corruption. The church has to attack sin, not entertainment, and not avoiding speaking against sin. It is not just a matter of praying but also taking initiative in challenging the moral issue of the political class.

### **Missional Implication of Research and its Practice**

It is evident from the findings that the church has been compromised in her identity, character, and calling. On a view of the prophetic voice of the church, they should take a stand for social justice and social action in line with Micah 6:8. How can the voice of the



Church be heard in society? Only by doing what is required from her, this is a call to faithfulness.

The Church needs to see that there is a mission field within the government arena; politics should not be taken as a dirty game for Christians to be engaged in but where they can shine as light. The Church needs to highly consider discipleship of its members as a way of dealing with this pandemic called corruption, when Church members are well trained how to be true disciples of Jesus, they will be able to resist temptations even when they are serving in the government, they will come to understand that their role is to present Christ to those who do not know him and have a relationship with God.

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