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BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION: TRUTH DISCREDITED IN MATTHEW 28, 11-15: APPLICATION TO NIGERIA SITUTATION.

DOMINIC OBIELOSI
Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University
Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.
dobielosi@yahoo.com

Abstract
Bribery and corruption, twin words that complement each other have remained the bane and remote cause of many problems in human history. They are familiar terms known to every Tom, Dick and Harry. Among the elites, it is a problem. The less educated are not excluded. The story is not even different in the Church and her leaders. Yet it is a malady that does no good. In Matthew 28, 11-15, the high priests attempted to cover up the reality of Jesus' resurrection by bribing the guards and giving them specific instruction to testify against the claims of the believers. The research believes that the story of humanity has not changed till today. The paper is structured to give an exegetical interpretation of Matthew 28, 11-15. It also gives an application of the interpretation to the situation in Nigeria and then proffers some ameliorative measures.

Keywords: Bribery, Corruption, Truth, Exegesis, Nigerian Situation.

Introduction

Bribery and corruption have remained inseparable twins that have remained a cog in the wheel to the progress of humanity. Bribery is born of selfishness and self-love rather than necessarily self-interest. Fromm (1975) footnoting Spinoza in his ethics distinguishes between self-interest, selfishness and self-love. The first is born of the natural desire to survive while the last two are vices born of uncooked materialism, greed and insatiability. Corruption is the effect of bribery. It is not a recent development. It goes back to biblical times, the golden age of philosophy and has continued till date. In Judges 16,18 the Philistines bribed Delilah into betraying Samson for a lump sum of money. In Acts 8,18 Simon the Magician offered the Apostles money to get the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In our world today, the story is not different. It is an evil that has rendered many nations clay-footed giants. The media is replete with corrupt officials both at the government and religious levels. The one of Nigeria is regrettable because our people scarcely have the basic amenities to enjoy. Corruption in Nigeria is a serious contagious disease that has endemically and indirectly involved every Nigerian, quite irrespective of one's position and upbringing, while the ability to avoid it is a sacrifice yet to be cultivated by Nigerians. According to Momoh (1991) the twin engine of the machinery of corruption and bribery are the only things that operate smoothly and efficiently across the country. It sweeps from the Executive to the Judiciary arms of governments, opportunistic traditional rulers to merchants of ostentation and violence not excluding those who by their choice seek to exclude important segments of society. For instance, in 2011 in an article titled "FG uncovers corruption in judiciary *N106bn traced to judgment procurement *Judges own luxury houses in UK, UAE, S/Africa". Adisan, (2011:34) wrote that:

> The last has not been heard of the development in the judiciary, as far as corruption is concerned. A report in the hands of the state has confirmed that some properties were bought globally, especially in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), South Africa and London. Some of the real owners are judicial personnel, whose total emoluments cannot in anyway justify the purchases. Some of them have been found to send their children to some of the most expensive schools in the world, without taking loans. These are mind-boggling discoveries,… The offences vary from judgment procurement to undue influence on judges. It dates back to the Obasanjo/Atiku era," the source said.… It has become so embarrassing to the government that judgments of Nigeria, which were readily cited in the United Kingdom and other lands are no longer regarded. Law students outside the country no longer see the judgments from Nigeria as worth the paper on which they are written.

Abati (2011) writing on the seeming shattered hope after the return of democracy in Nigeria lamented bitterly that one of the really sober realizations of the last two and a half years of democratic rule in Nigeria has been the failure of the political class to manage the burden that history has again thrown onto it slaps. He believes that we have in power, men and women who seem to be behaving as if there was no yesterday, and as if there would be no tomorrow, the future if it exists in their reckoning belongs to another country because the thieving has remained in the high places just as the soldiers they replaced. Ehusani (2002) did not mince words in picturing the situation when he says that Nigerians have been stripped naked by a corrupt and callous elite and that we have suffered humiliation in the hands of wicked and decadent leaderships. Nigerians have lost their collective pride to the greed and avarice of our kith and kin who recognize no order except the one established by mammon.

The story is not even different in religious circles as most of the so called 'men of God' and 'strong priests' have corrupt government officials as friends. Some of them are accessible only to the rich and can only render their services for money. Tithes and illegal collections witnessed in our churches these days are all grandchildren of corruption. The major problem with corruption is that it blinds the clear sighted and warps the truth. This is what we see in Matt 28,11-15. The Jewish leaders attempted to cover up the fact of Jesus' resurrection by bribing the soldiers. Applying exegetical and hermeneutical methods, this paper interprets Matt 28,11-15. It zeroes it down to Nigerian situation and then posits self-discipline as the ultimate solution both on the part of our political and religious leaders and the led.

Exegesis of Matt 28, 11-15

Preliminary Observations

a. Delimitation of the Pericope

   The section preceding our text, Matt 28,1-10 deals with the Resurrection and the experience of an empty tomb by the women who went early to anoint the body of Jesus. The immediate periscope after, Matt 28,16-20, details the commissioning of the disciples with the Mandatum Magnum. In effect therefore, Matt 28,11-15 stands prominent as a unit of its own based on its theme on the purported report given by the corrupt guards after accepting a huge sum of money from the Jewish leaders to cover up the truth.

b. Greek Text of Matt 28,11-15 and Textual Criticism

Poreuomenōn de autōn idou tines tēs koustōdias eltontes eis tēn polin apēggeilan tois arxiereusin hapanta ta genomena. [12] kai sunachtentes meta tōn presbuterōn sumboulion te labontes argurai hikana edwkan tois stratiōtais[13] legontes, Eipate hoti Hoi matētai autou nuktos elthontes eklepsan auton hēmōn koimōmenōn.[14] kai ean akoustē touto epi tou hēgemonos hēmeis peisomen (auton) kai humas amerimnous poiēsomen.[15] hoi de labontes ta arguria epoiēsan hōs edidachtēsan. Kai diefēmisthē ho logos outos para Ioudaiois mechri tēs sēmeron (hēmeras)

c. Working Translation
Now as they were going on their way, behold some of the custodians going into the city recounted to the chief priests everything that happened. And having gathered with the council of elders, taking considerable money, they gave to the soldiers saying, 'Say that his disciples came at night to steal him as we were sleeping.' And if this gets to the hearing of the governor, we shall persuade him and we shall make you free. Now having the received the considerable sum of money, they did as they were taught and this word was spread abroad in among the Jews until today.

d. Textual Problems
Few textual issues are observable in the text of Matt 28,11-15. In v. 11 some manuscripts like א, D, Q, 565 have 'anēggeilan' as alternative reading for 'apēggeilan'. The recent nature of the manuscripts shows it to be an attempted correction to make the text easier to read and understand. Again in v. 14, B D 0148.892 *pc* have '*upo*' as alternative reading while A C D L W 0148.0234 f $^{1.13}$Û lat sy have the same reading attested in our text. The alternative reading is witnessed more in later texts and uncials whereas more ancient manuscripts and majority texts agree with our text. Hence, it is most probable that our text is closer to the original. In v. 15, few corrected manuscripts like ϯ א* B* W 0234 *pc* omitted 'ta' while A B^{2} D L Q 0148 *f* $^{1.13}$ 33 Û have the same reading with our text. The fact that the omission is evidenced mostly in corrected texts make its originality doubtful.

Form/Structure/Setting

The preceding pericopae established the factuality of the resurrection. The Jewish authorities must make up stories to counteract the resurrection claims proved especially by the empty tomb. Brown (1994) believes that the text follows the closely related text of Matt 27,62-66 and may originally have composed with it one single, connected narrative. The concluding sentence, the last mention of the Jews in the Gospel, provides a sad commentary on widespread Jewish unbelief in the evangelist's day. Not even the 'sign of Jonah' of Matt 12,38-40 would make them alter their fixed opinion of Jesus and they lied to preserve that opinion. Also, Matt 28,11-15 like its counterpart in Matt 27,62-66 is unique to Matthew. It is either composed by the author himself or he must have gotten it from his unknown source. The apocryphal Gospel of Peter 45-49 has something close to Matt 28,11-15 but probably the former got his story from the later, since Matthew is evidently an earlier text to Peter's.
Hagner suggests the following outline as the structure of the text:

i. The report of the guards (v.11)
ii. The bribing of the guards (v.12)
iii. The concocted story (v.13)
iv. The protection from Pilate (v.14)

v. The compliance of the guards (v. 15a)
vi. The Evangelist's summarising comment (v. 15b)

Semantic analysis of the text
Bauer (2000) explains 'koustōdias' as a group of soldiers performing the duty of guarding something. The author used present participle 'Poreuomenōn' having an aspect of continuity in reference to the women and 'eltontes', an aorist participle in reference to the guard of soldiers with an aspect of an action performed and terminated. The careful coinage expresses the action of the women as unterminated. They were still on their way into the city with joys to narrate their experience of the empty tomb and the apparition of Christ while the soldiers who also went into the city, already finished giving their false report. There is a force of contemporaneity in the action of movement into the city both on the part of both parties, the women and the soldiers. However, possibly, the soldiers moved faster and gave their report and finished it ever before the women could get into the city. The emphasis on going into the city 'eis tēn polin' simply underscores the fact that the tomb where Jesus was buried as well as the location of the crucifixion was outside the city walls.

The gospel of Matthew always mentioned the chief priests and the elders as representatives of Jewish authorities especially in the passion narrative (cf. Matt 16,21; 21,33; 26,3.47; 27,1.3.12.20). It is not surprising therefore, that for a serious matter like the resurrection, their meeting together (sumboulion labontes) was a necessity. The force of the aorist participle used in 'labontes' indicates their decisiveness to do something. The best line of action they believed was to cover up the truth by bribing the soldiers to keep them from telling the truth. They gave them a considerable sum of silver money (argurai hikana). The word 'hikanos' meaning 'to attain' or 'to reach with the hand' has always been used in the sense of 'adequate', 'sufficient', 'enough' or 'large enough'. Its usage in the NT corresponds to this secular sense also. Statistically, it occurs forty (40) times in the NT. The occurrence is unevenly distributed with 3 in Matthew, 3 in Mark, 27 in Luke and 6 in Paul. It is not seen in Johannine writings, in Hebrew nor in any of the Catholic epistles. Rengstorf (1995) indicates that it is a typical Hellenistic word in the NT because it is not given any particular emphasis in the places it occurs in the NT nor in non-biblical texts of the same time. Commenting on its usage in Matthew 28,12 Bauer (2000) describes it as substantial bribe. The whole statement in v. 12 'kai sunachtentes meta tōn presbuterōn sumboulion te labontes argurai hikana edwkan tois stratiōtais' is reminiscent of, and serves as an inclusion to, the gathering of the same authorities at the beginning of the passion narrative (Matt 26,3-4) and he offering of arguria as here and in v. 15, to Judas in return for his betrayal of Jesus (Matt 26,15) (Hagner, 1995).

After the soldiers received the money, they spoke as instructed. Their report is ironical because they were posted to guard the tomb against intrusion only for the same people to come to say that the disciples took the body (matētai autou nuktos elthontes eklepsan auton). Comically enough, the disciples did it while the soldiers were asleep (hēmōn koimōmenōn). Obviously, one would wonder how they knew what happened and the perpetrators if they were really sleeping. The implication is that the soldiers were irresponsible because they should not be sleeping when their duty demands that they be awake. This idea is enforced by the middle/passive voice used by the author to describe their sleeping (koimōmenōn). It simply indicates that they totally deep in sleep. Jones (1965) notes that the 'sleep' excuse is

thrown out carelessly as a suggestion. It could be used only before the general public because if it came to official inquiry, sleeping on duty is not an adequate excuse.

The 'touto' of which Pilate the governor, their supreme commanding officer (Matt 27,65) might possibly become aware of is probably referring to the story of the body being stolen while they were asleep, which tantamount to their ineffectiveness in duty. It would be referring to the bribery since the bribery was a secret between them, there was no way Pilate could be aware of it. They promised to conciliate Pilate should he get to be in the know.

In v. 15, the soldiers were happy to do as the leaders instructed them (hōs edidachtēsan). The soldiers falsified a fact because of money given to them by the Jewish leaders. Trilling (1969) describes the action as attempt to distort the truth by lies. With this, the author of Matthew still maintained his consistent motif in the gospel that the Jews were unreceptive to Jesus and his teachings. As early as Matt 9,3.34, the Jews rejected Christ and his claims.

Hermeneutic Application to Nigeria Situation:

The action of the Jewish leaders in Matt 28,11-15 and the acceptance of their corrupt suggestions by the soldiers give a vivid picture of the problem with Nigeria. The truth is that every sector of Nigeria is corrupt beginning with the leadership to elites in schools and even businessmen and beggars on the streets. The religious sector is not shielded from the malady. Many authors blame the problem with Nigeria on the artificial marriage of different nations as Nigeria by the colonial masters through the instrumentality of Lord Lugard in 1914.Authors like I.O. Dim and J.M. Okpalaonwuka (n.d.); and Onwubiko (2010) hold this position. This could be true but that is not all. Big countries like the USA are also merged together. They had their problems. They eventually came to table to tackle their differences and have a road map to better their future. Today, they are almost the best and greatest nation on earth. We must not dwell on the flimsy excuse of amalgamation to continue draining the national coffer for selfish ends. The fact is that the history of leadership in Nigeria since independence seems to be a story of corruption. In the words of Odey (2001:76):

> Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's regime did not see it until the military struck in 1966. Yakubu Gowon did not see it either until he also was removed from office. Murtala Mohammed saw it, tried to do something about it but they killed him before he could succeed. Obasanjo himself did not feel the pinch of it when he ruled Nigeria first. Today, corruption is his albatross. Muhammadu Buhari saw it as a great threat to Nigeria. He tried to do something about it, but failed partly because fighting corruption in Nigeria is not an easy task and partly because Ibrahim Babaginda who ousted his regime felt that Nigeria could not live without corruption.

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who has been praised variously for his positive legacies was also the first major political figure investigated for questionable practices. In 1944, a firm belonging to him bought a bank in Lagos to strengthen local control of financial industry. Report of the investigation showed that though he resigned as chairman of the bank, the current chairman was his agent and that most of the paid-up capital of ACB was from the Eastern Regional Financial Corporation.

Gowon as military Head of State did not take any decisive step against corrupt elements in his government. His governors were labelled misguided individuals acting like lords overseeing their personal fiefdom. In 1975 many officials of the defence ministry and central bank of Nigeria were implicated in the importation of cement scandal.

Shehu Shagari was deemed pervasive during his administration. Some federal buildings mysteriously went on fire after investigators started probe on the finances of the officials working in the buildings. In 1985 with the collapse of Johnson Mathey Bank of London, it was discovered that the bank served as a conduit to transfer hard currency for some party members in Nigeria.

Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida regime was seen as a body that legalized corruption. He has refused to give account of the gulf war oil windfall estimated to about $12.4 billion dollars. He cancelled what was regarded as one of the most successful and free election in Nigeria in 2012. Today he still enjoys freedom and lives in his exquisite mansion in Niger state.

The Abacha regime is a period that Ehusani (2002) rightly describes as the time when generality of Nigerians was plagued by collective amnesia and corporate myopia. Intimidation, harassment, coercion and triumph of mediocrity was the order of the day. Except for the peace of the grave, Nigeria knew no peace. There was no war yet uneasy calm greeted the fear that coerced the people into accepting the anomaly. Professionals and elites embarked on voluntary exile to avoid possible arrest. The result of all these on the national landscape was the glorification of mediocrity, the institutionalization of corruption, the banishment of truth, honesty, fairness and hard work, and the progressive degeneration or decay of the moral fibre of society (Ehusani, 2002). It was not long after Abacha's death that Nigerians started hearing of 'Abacha loot'.

Other Nigerian governmental agencies are not shielded from this corruption saga. The Nigeria Survey and Corruption Survey Study, Final Report of The Institute for Development Research (ABU 2003) gives the following as institutions perceived as most corrupt:

i. Nigeria Police Force
ii. Political Parties
iii. National and State Assemblies
iv. Local and Municipal Governments
v. Federal and State Executive Councils
vi. Traffic Police and FRSC
vii. PHCN

The story is not different among religious bodies. Obiora (1999:45) documents that:

> The Nigerian religious scene is beset with daunting doctrinal skirmishes and these have led to further splits and divisions. Pride, pomposity and quest to be called leader and founder, rather than work for unity, individuals tend to see their subjective views and conclusions in absolute terms. Bitterness, prejudice,

> mutual mistrust, commoditization of religion – these have combined to cast living shadows on the history of ecumenism.

According to Ehusani (2004:22) it remains a perennial truth that: "… as long as we remained saddled with visionless leadership, corrupt leadership, leadership without moral principles, leadership without responsibility, and leadership without discipline, so long shall we remain a bumbling giant holding only a basket of potential force".

Recommended Solutions

This paper submits that until people, both the leaders and the led cultivate the habit of self-discipline, we shall still remain prisoners to bribery and corruption. Over and above self-discipline, there are few more steps we need to take for total freedom. A brief look at some of the points will make it clearer.

I. **Sōfrōn (Self-discipline):**

Sōfrōn: A Greek term meaning 'self-discipline or self-control'. Bauer (1979) sees it as one of sound mind. It is being in control of oneself. It includes avoidance of extremes and careful consideration for responsible action. Readers' Digest Encyclopedic Dictionary sees it as the act or power of having one's energies under the control of the will.

In the Old Testament, it is not simply a moderation or modesty on the basis of correct self-evaluation but the work of the teacher (Prov 1,8; 15,5; 19,20) or God as in Deut 11,2; Isa 26,16; Jer 30,14; Prov 15,10. In association with other virtues like justice, it is traced back to the wisdom which lives with God in symbiosis (Wis 8,3).

In the New Testament, this word and its cognates occur about 14x out of which 8 occurrences are in Pauline writings. In Mark 5,15 (paralleled in Luke 8,35), the people confirmed the healing of the demoniac by Jesus because they saw him sitting in his right senses. In Rom 12,3 Paul uses it to admonish the Romans to be of sound mind and not go beyond their liits. He defines the measure as *metron pisteōs* (measure of faith) which God gives and which is exhibited in integration into the community and concrete service within it. The parameter for measuring true Christian service is expressed in Phil 2,3. It is simply not doing anything from selfishness (cf. Col 3,12ff). it connotes sober devotion to others. Such altruistic devotion puts into effect the love of Christ which consists in His self-sacrifice and by implication sacrifice from Christians (2Cor 5,14). Peter recommends soberness and moderation for all believers so that they do not fall victim to frivolous worldliness (1Pet 4,7). In the Pastorals, it is used to characterize good life in the world especially for Christians whose goal is to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world. As distinct from Gnostic scorn of the world, the Christian lives in the world but not of it. He manifests proper attitude to the things of the world. 1Tim 4,3-5 holds that the correct relation is marked by moderation and contentedness. Titus 2,5 takes it in reference to chastity and disciplined life. In 1Tim 3,2 and Titus 1,8, self-discipline is in the list of requirements for a bishop.

Our biblical excursus into the meaning of sōfrōn is not simply theological. Since it is on eof the qualities required for a would-be bishop, we modify Luck (1971) to note that the reference is not just to conduct appropriate to faith but also to presuppositions necessary for the

discharge of a leading office. It becomes even more pertinent in Nigeria where bad governance is generally seen ias the major cog in our wheel to progress. Self-discipline is an uncommon character worthy of praise. It is an exceptional civic virtue. It permeates every aspect of one's life, private and public. It is a virtue that is directly connected with a person's will power. One who has disciplined the self is not addicted to anything and is not a slave to worldly frivolities. The will could be disciplined by:

a. *Developing and following one's priorities*.
   If a leader does what he must only when he is in the mood or when it is convenient, he is not going to be successful. As a leader, one has little time. All he needs is a plan. If one can determine his priorities and free himself from everything else, it becomes easier for him to follow what is important and this is the essence of discipline.
b. *Make disciplined lifestyle your goal*.
   Self-discipline is not just one-time event. It has to be a lifestyle. Developing systems and routines especially in crucial areas of your long-term growth and success is the best way to cultivate the habit of self-discipline.
c. *Challenge your excuses*.
   Elimination of any tendency to make excuses helps one imbibe self-discipline. Indeed, all our faults are more pardonable than the methods we think up to hide them. Do not give yourself any reason not to be self-disciplined.

II. **Conscience Driven Political Elite**

The political class is most often the role model in directing the course to be followed by the citizenry. Few Nigerian leaders have been exemplary in engineering memorable development and creation of jobs. Majority however, used their privileged position for embezzlement at the expenses of the poor masses. If Nigeria must be free from corruption, her political elites must listen to the voices of their good conscience.

III. **Religion**

Rather than reducing religion to the level of an opium for the people, convincing them into accepting everything as good with threats of hell fire, religious leaders ought to teach the people what it means to be truly human. They ought to make the people understand that holiness is not synonymous with fanaticism and obsequiousness. Transparency in their efforts to rid themselves of corruption and undue attachment to corrupt leaders will go a long way in serving as light to the populace. It will enliven their trust and confidence in religion.

IV. **Avoidance of procrastination**

Don Marquis maintains correctly that procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday. Flora Whittemore explains that the doors we open and close each day decide the lives we live.

Conclusion

In Matt 28,11-15, the soldiers accepted some money illegally in order to lie and cover up the fact of resurrection. The same ill of corruption that merited them no good has remained the bane of our world, especially our dear country Nigeria. It is not a happy news that in 2004, Nigeria was rated by Transparency International as the third most corrupt country in the world. Until bribery and corruption is dealt with, till self-integrity is enthroned by all in

Nigeria, the dream of a better Nigeria shall remain entrapped in slow coach if not in capsizing boat. Arachie (2009) believes that Nigeria may not make any meaningful progress as long as large scale corruption persists in the country. Nigeria is richly blessed with enormous mineral resources and human capital, yet greater number of her citizens live at poverty level. The years of her oil boom were eaten up by locusts in the name of political leaders. Gradually, it became apparently engraved in the fabrics of her citizenry that survival without corruption is not possible. Thus, basically every sector of the country is corrupt. Good governance appears to be an expression only on paper without practicality. Just as the soldiers attempted to cover up the truth by bribery and corruption, so the true meaning of life and pride of a nation have been sacrificed on the altar of corruption in Nigeria. Only self-discipline, conscience driven life, authentic religion and love for our country can ameliorate the already hopeless situation.

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