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Religious faith traditions tussle with rampant corruption toward sustainable development: Search for the missing links in light of *ubuntu*

ABSTRACT

There is a raging debate in scholarly discourse on the role of religious faith traditions in influencing firm dispositions on various institutions and economic growth. Religious faith traditions are fighting rampant corruption that is drawing back socio-economic growth. The vice contradicts the religious faith principles of being virtuous. The church has a mandate to challenge and speak out against corruption. Corrupt tendencies permeate all institutions and cultures in the world, leading to general retrogression in sustainable development. This article aims to seek the missing links in empowering anti-corruption officials in their stated targets. It investigates the achievements of the church in fighting all types and forms of corruption. The study adopts both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Interviews and questionnaires are the data-collection tools. A cross-sectional survey study design was used to collect data from a stratified random sampling of 100 respondents by means of structured questionnaires in Harare, Zimbabwe. The church has a moral and social obligation to fulfil its prophetic mission of fighting corruption. This article analyses how the church can influence the state apparatus in the fight against corruption.

1. INTRODUCTION

The world's major faith traditions (Christian, Islamic, Jewish, African, Buddhist and Hindu) are all tussling against corruption, which has become an impediment to sustainable development. This article explores whether these religious faith traditions can team up to act and regularly release joint monthly statements against corruption, in order to strengthen the power of anti-corruption commissions. Faith customs have fundamental ideologies that can stimulate attachment and linking societal resources over public facility and the likelihood of high opinion and open-mindedness (Furbey & Rowntree 2006). The article shows that these faith traditions play a role in inculcating the public with knowledge on how to shun corruption and report it to the relevant authorities. The fight is to strengthen the social fabric and influence anti-corruption fighters to stand firm in nailing the perpetrators of corruption. Recent developments suggest that a number of Pentecostal ministries in Southern Africa and East Africa are subsidising social restructuring, by urging their memberships and all populaces to defy all corrupt tendencies and alter their family members, societies and nation-states (Chitando *et al.* 2017:233). It is also noted that religious faith traditions trigger the good of society in fighting the vice. The mentioned scholars chose to concentrate on the extent to which some Pentecostal ministers in Southern Africa and East Africa pursued to be agents of socio-economic revolution. This study also examines other religious faith traditions.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Corruption has become a front-page observable fact. Scholars, individuals, lawyers, and church leaders, who seek answers to whether corruption can be curbed in sync with moral values and the spirit of *ubuntu*, promulgate debates and counter debates. Corruption in Zimbabwe appears to be taking central stage. The problem statement concerns the ambiguity posed by the "untouchable gurus" associated with corrupt activities, with some boasting of being the elite. However, the reality on the ground is that what is obtaining in society is somehow different from what morality calls for. The implication is that some corrupt people propagate their own defence regarding corruption without a baseline as to what is right or wrong. Those who are corrupt have been labelled wealth makers who particularly make use of the powers vested in them to blindfold officers who try to investigate their sources of wealth. The quest, therefore, to gain insight into the accessibility of wealth from a non-entity investment and usage of political muscles not in tandem with the state's viewpoint necessitated this study through the lenses of *ubuntu* in African Christianity.

3. PREVALENT FORMS OF CORRUPTION

There are many forms of corruption that are a serious disease for the people, in that bribery has become commonplace in every institution. If left unchecked, people will continue to remain disadvantaged. The spread of corruption has become prevalent. I mention three out of the seven forms of corruption intended by Alatas (1968):

- Transactive corruption: For the benefit of both parties, the giver and the recipient pursue the benefits for personal gain.
- Extortive corruption: The giver is forced to bribe, in order to prevent losses that are threatening him, his interests, or the people and things he values.
- Defensive corruption: The giver is innocent but the recipient is guilty. For example, a businessman who cruelly wants someone's property cannot sinfully give a portion of the assets to the ruler, in order to save the remainder of his assets.

4. CORRUPTION: VIRTUE OR VICE IN LIGHT OF *UBUNTU*

In this article, corruption is regarded as the misuse of public position for reserved or sectional achievement. It flourishes most where leaders and officials exercise power without accountability. Corruption is a misdeed that can be committed by professionals such as doctors, accountants, engineers, and lawyers. It involves expertise in action in the form of disciplinary violations. There are many examples of corruption, with the most extreme being Mobutu of Zaire and General Abacha of Nigeria (see Gathogo 2008). By and large, corruption is considered injurious to trade and industry development. Some contend that, within a short space of time, enticements may possibly serve as lubricants in circumstances of unscrupulous economic bodies. Anticipated corruption with reasonable proportions likewise gives the impression to be a justly meaningless observable fact (Paldam, 2001). Corruption is indeed a serious problem.

Recently, aspects such as buying-off, paying off, and corruption, which can come in a variety of forms (gifts or bribes) have abused *ubuntu*. Demand for sexual favours as a condition to pass at a college; paying half price for a traffic offence of 100 dollars is corruption. In the African perception of gratitude and hospitality, gifts are simply given and not claimed as other people do nowadays. Significance, in most instances, is found in the essence of generosity and not in measurable wealth. I am of the view that a gift should be offered during broad daylight, in the open and under no circumstances

in secret. Wherever a gift is disproportionate, it turns out to be a humiliation and is reimbursed (Akinola 2006). Whenever corruption takes place, the underprivileged, the elderly, the impaired, the youngsters, and the youth suffer the most. No wonder that, at one time, Karl Marx purported that the rich would remain rich, while the poor would remain poor.

My main objective in this article is not to philosophise. It is worth noting that various publications have referred to *ubuntu* as *ubuntu* philosophy, merely because it is one of the most published aspects of African hospitality that clearly embodies African positive thinking (see Chukwu 1995:300). In defining *ubuntu* as an aspect of African hospitality, it is important to accentuate that it is defined differently in several African societies. For example, on my visit to East Africa, particularly Nairobi, Kenya, from 26 to 29 June 2019, Swahili speakers use *utu* for *ubuntu* and the Kikuyu of Kenya use *umundu*. *Ubuntu* is called *unhu* among the Shona who migrated to Kenya in 1962, and *ubuntu* among the Nguni speakers of Southern Africa. *Ubuntu* is basically a deep-thinking and religious notion that describes an individual in light of his/her relation with others. In other words, one's relations with the entire community are considered central. The Kikuyu of Kenya taught me the expression *Mundu nimundu niundu waandu*, that is, "a human being is a person because of the other people". From an African perspective, the being one is to grow into, by behaving with humankind, is an ancestor praiseworthy. Individuals who maintain the principle of *ubuntu* strive not to be corrupt; they work hard to be rewarded by organisations without fear or favour (Mbiti 1969:83). In as far as corruption jeopardises community life, it is associated with the aspect of *ubuntu* as well as with social circumstances of the community.

Justus Mbae, in his address on *ubuntu* and the challenges of modernism, once highlighted that an insatiable desire for acquisition of material wealth leads to corruption, exploitation of persons, indifference, and lack of human compassion, caring, and love. Surely, in the early days when *ubuntu* held the society tightly, no one ate unless all could eat. The needs of the individual were the needs of society at large. Nowadays, when Africans engage in corruption, they are shamelessly eating and enjoying, while others have nothing at the table. Indeed, this is corruption at its highest level, an abuse of *unhu*, *hunhu* as we know it in Shona culture. Religious faith leaders in many African countries state that, for Africa to develop wholly, there is a need to unpack and uncover the rampant corruption that is drawing back the communities. This must be done and put into action by all structures.

Based on the interviews (2020), respondent (A) asserted that it is an undeniable fact that, in a community where major faith traditions exist and operate, there should be more virtuous people because their everyday teachings are directed at altering peoples' livelihoods and rebranding the social order to reduce dishonesty and increase sustainable development.

5. INTERNALISATION OF THE CORRUPT CRISIS BY RELIGIOUS FAITH TRADITIONS

Respondents were of the view that some religious faith traditions leaders also play a role in assisting corrupt officials to internalise the situation. Respondent (B) quoted one leader who mentioned that they do not interfere in the internal affairs of their superiors. In this context, they referred to current and former influential politicians who are always quoted on the wrong side, saying that they cannot reprimand them. Religious faith traditions are a global character of the church. Interviewees noted that religious bodies have certainly contributed to keeping the international community focused on the corrupt leaders or officials, as they often pray for their conversion.

According to Kajongwe *et al.* (2019), matters dealing with corporate domination are more noticeable on contemporary business platforms. Rossouw (2005) avers that corporate governance, intertwined by means of business principles, is regarded as acute in both administrative exercises and general efficiency. Business ethics, foundational values, and commercial supremacy are in line with the *unhu/ubuntu* philosophy of members of a system of government as part and parcel of society. Interpersonal relations with communal associates instil camaraderie, affection, compassion, and sharing in any institution. Moloketi (2009) and Nyarwath (2002) observe that the most important supremacy problem in present-day governance matters has to do with corruption. Corruption exposes the ethical wantonness and immorality of the wrongdoers. By and large, corruption is instigated by the culprits' lack of ethical principles, because of poor moral will towards other persons. Corruption can be viewed as an ethical issue, where the committers are basically immoral, due to lack of moral knowledge and misperception. Broodryk (2006) argues that moral concerns have an emotional impact on individuals in a negative way where personalities manipulate their own and certified influences. Corrupt tendencies occur in diverse systems that consist of favouritism, misapplication of authority, bias, and enticement. Moloketi (2009) submits that corruption exhibits itself in the connections among personalities and organisations. He adds that it is frequently entrenched in the processes of market powers or forces. My view is that corruption is a quest for personal affluence, compared to the communal worthiness of the public. It suffices to point out that it slows down and undermines the social and collective institutions, while simultaneously promoting inequality. To curtail corruption, for example, the *unhu/ubuntu* philosophy must be in the form of a value scheme that reinforces the assurance to eradicate this vice (Moloketi 2009:243, 247). The authors affirm the value of religious faith traditions as a source of positive directives in supporting and empowering anti-corruption fighters. In buttressing this aspect, the church has a moral and

social obligation to fulfil its prophetic mission to fight corruption which has become an acute problem. Since *unhu/ubuntu* pervades all sectors of the community, faith-based groups and even the private sector can stand firm in imparting knowledge that supports the value of the *unhu/ubuntu* way of life.

From what I have observed, many of the contributions regarding business, education, farming, and corporate governance matters arise from the *unhu/ubuntu* philosophy. The *ubuntu* philosophy permeates all spheres of life (Makuvaza 2014). It is very important to note that selfishness, gluttony, and profiteering against fellow societal members become a breach of the basic *ubuntu* frameworks. It is hospitable to provide a basis in communal team spirit, in the midst of the members of any system of government or society.

Generally, the collected works expose the remarkable influence that the *unhu/ubuntu* viewpoint has made in societies in the practice of its distinctive supervision that prevails in many African societies. It is, however, possible and crucial to embrace all thoughts and contributions regarding the *munhukwaye* or *ubuntu* way of life when trying to implement the *unhu/ubuntu* philosophy, in as much as it is quite challenging to attain.

6. SOME CHALLENGES

The challenge for most of the churches, as proposed notably by August (2010), rests in being a resilient leading light fighting against socio-economic unfairness, mistreatment, and dishonesty, and contesting all forms of commercial, religious, and governmental arrangements that add to the woes of the underprivileged. It is demoralising to experience the alarming rate of societal dilapidation and predominance of corruption in our communities. When one examines the proliferation of religious faith traditions from the Cape to Cairo, one wonders why anti-corruption fighters fail to address the issue of corruption. Automatically, one would ask how the world, a country, cities, communities, and villages can empower anti-corruption fighters, the police, the army, intelligence organisations, and prison officers, bearing in mind that there are many religious faith traditions in every community. Corrupt tendencies shatter high hopes of sustainable development.

The interviewees echoed that religious faith traditions play an active role in their efforts to expose corrupt individuals. They added that several challenges have restricted the effectiveness of this role. The responsible authorities, the government, and the judiciary have been quick to respond to the criticisms by religious faith traditions, by promoting the visibility of others who are more favourable to it. Religious faith leaders, who have a soft spot for an incumbent government or ministry, for instance, receive material and financial benefits, and invitations to national events are extended to them.

From the study, I observed that mainline church leaders and African initiated church leaders grace state functions or occasions in southern Africa. On these occasions, these church leaders tend to remain silent, thereby failing to advise, be it the presidium or the ministers responsible, to fight and lead to the arrest of corrupt officials.

Interviewees argued that leaders of religious faith traditions should join forces with other stakeholders in civil society and demand the arrest and public hearing of all corrupt officials. They stressed that utmost care must be taken before plunging states or institutions into socio-economic depression. Hence, their unison calls for a roadmap that embraces the call to open courts for corrupt officials. While this is a good move, some religious faith traditions have no say in the corruption at the core of reputable personnel in different sectors. Religious leaders have a culture of saying "Let us just pray that the rot may end" and those practising it may be punished in the next life.

The respondents mentioned that the vast majority of religious faith leaders are beneficiaries of various funds from different ministries. For example, in Zimbabwe, some benefit from the land reform programme and, by virtue of that, they cannot preach against corrupt leadership. Several ministries have funds designated for a purpose. Supervisors or managers in some firms are responsible for the day-to-day operations of such funds. In the education sector, the school services fund is manned by the ministry of primary and secondary education, in the case of Zimbabwe. The government or responsible authorities allocate finances to health, education, and agriculture, among others. At one time, Bishop Matthews (not real name) benefitted from the Reserve Bank and acquired farming equipment and vehicles without proper documentation. Indeed, there are officials whose expenditure is not documented. A person's transaction can amount to thousands of dollars without any supporting documents. Respondents noted that this has compromised the ability of religious faith traditions leaders to speak with one voice against corruption and other issues of national interest. According to the Zimbabwean code of ethics, people should not implore or receive enticements in an endeavour to bring out or contain the publication of a story or offer anyone a job. That being the case, human resources personnel at educational institutions accept money from the source. These corrupt practices are widespread, including at registry and health institutions. Based on global data, Yang (2012:209) remarks that the availability of various programmes such as journalism significantly reduces the level of media bribery. Religious faith traditions have preached that all people should practise professional principles, regardless of situation and context. I also suggest that various codes of conduct should be simplified, explained, and be published, in order to make people aware of what is right and wrong.

7. THE RELIGIOUS FAITH TRADITIONS' ROLE IN ELIMINATING CORRUPTION

Walsh and Kaufman (1999) presented religion as a tactical resource to get populations vigorously embroiled in communal and party-political activities. One respondent stated that he recognises the distinct spiritual role and sacrifice, which religious faith traditions make, in trying to fight corruption. In this regard, church ministers have often assisted in areas that would elsewhere be the task of the government, the courts, and even the police. Church leaders and ecumenical bodies regularly address societal concerns at an institutional level. According to Kanyandago (1998), Christians cannot leave this serious problem of corruption, which he terms "unfair international trade", in the hands of politicians only. Agbiji and Swart (2015) discussed the place of African traditional religions, Christianity, and Islam in societal alteration. They asserted that African religiosity can work as the foundation for fighting corruption. Nonetheless, they believe that sacred practitioners have been self-satisfied in Africa's fight against the eradication of poverty and corrupt activities.

Faith-based assemblies are, in numerous ways, rightly positioned in the communities as they play an influential role in improvement and serve as agents. According to Clarke (2011:10), this fundamentally says a great deal about progress effects and corrupt tendencies. A few religious groups have a noticeable place in every community, and religious leaders are well situated to meaningfully subsidise economic progress. It is important to note that influence initiated through these groups can be both positive and negative. Holy books encompass several writings that are appropriate to many circumstances in day-to-day operation. The holy Bible's stories depict the sovereigns as being condemned for the punitive treatment of their societies and particularly the underprivileged. Practitioners of religion can make use of the Bible in castigating their ruling governments, without being precise on the circumstances to which they refer. It is important to note that this scenario can be a fruitful approach in the case of persecution by tyrannical rulers. In Nairobi, Kenya, Sakwa (2008) concisely pronounces the usage of scriptural manuscripts by sacred front-runners throughout colonialism and post-independence. Homilies are at times used as means whereby disapproval in contrast to subjugation is excommunicated. The researcher opines that religious practitioners stimulate revolution. It is an undeniable fact that religious faith leaders urge many people and the public, in general, to stand up and question incumbent government officials on corruption, women, child rights, and even political emancipation. South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Archbishop Pious Ncube played a pivotal part in perpetuating modifications or change. According to respondent (B), this can be said of Abu

Sa'eed al-khudree (may Allah be pleased with him) who whispered: I heard the messenger of God say, "whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart and that is the weakest of faith."

Reasonableness and natural life are the straightforward standpoints and the wonderful strands of religious customs. This builds the foundation for religious faiths' participation in improving the economy (Duchrow & Hinkelammert 2004:158) and fight against corruption. The use of party-political sponsorship to help only a few influential leaders is apparent. The laws forbid corruption, but day-to-day processes are not the same. They can take place through, say, a registrar official seeking a birthday or wedding anniversary present. In other instances, the extortionist can be a policeman offering a fine for an imaginary traffic offence. A technical college headmaster may demand a gift for accepting students expelled from other colleges due to misconduct. From a practical viewpoint, the role of religious faith leaders in economic development is a struggle for fairness and emancipation, with the predicament of the deprived and burdened in mind. Many people suffer, due to corruption and the effects of corrupt individuals who think of serving themselves first.

Pope Benedict XVI, in the encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), expressed that religion has an actual task to achieve, in all circumstances, in every community that is in harmony with man's dignity and spiritual calling. A reflection on this points out the objective of liberating people, above all from lack of food, dispossession, and corruption. Corruption regrettably manifests in economic and political classes in ancient and new developed nation states (Pope Benedict XVI:2009). According to Cowen and Shenton (1996:8-10), development is a way for improvement and functions as the turning point to corruption. Religious faith traditions strive to support development as the goal of universal human improvement. Refresher courses to remind people of their duties to society should be carried on from time to time.

8. RESPONSE RATE ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Saunders *et al.* (2003) point out that a response rate above 50 per cent is generally regarded as realistic when using a questionnaire. This study concurs with that perspective. On the other hand, Sarmer (2015) indicates that a response rate below 30 per cent is not valuable, hence untrustworthy. This study's response rate was over 75 per cent, thus guaranteeing good and precise results. Men, women, youth, and religious leaders from various

religious faith traditions were selected as respondents. Of the respondents, 60 per cent were males and 40 per cent were females.

The study established that religious faith traditions play a discerning part in opposing the misuses of organisations due to corruption.

There is a need to continue probing whether the church can sustain development among the greedy ills of the world. What is the exact cause of the rise in corruption rates in our societies at present? Surely further work should be done if the church is to sustain itself tomorrow and respond in whatever way it can. The study recommends that supervision and safeguarding human resource optimisation should be mandatory to improve management practices at all levels, in order to shun corruption. There is a need for a good legal system to eradicate the criminal acts of corruption.

This study recommends that religious faith leaders should play an educational role in informing communities on the consequences of corruption. They should also gain community responsiveness in a world where companies regulate the infrastructure's mass media and make use thereof. Religious faith traditions can adopt commercial achievements as covenantal civilisations in the community at large. This may entail setting up distinct financial agendas or persuasive administration at numerous levels to make available desirable facilities and to stop supporting businesses contrary to the attention of the community.

9. CONCLUSION

Religious faith traditions are the best vehicle for delivering a range of social programmes that try to eliminate corruption within societies. In as far as religions command some degree of moral leadership, the world tends to listen, thus perpetuating change and equipping anti-corruption commissions in the fight against this "unfair international trade". This study demonstrated that the concept of *ubuntu* (humanness) is an aspect of African hospitality that instils a virtue that warrants one to shun corrupt activities.

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