

# Echoes of injustice and false standards of worship in Nigerian Christians: A socio-ethical study of Isaiah 1:10-20

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**ABSTRACT:** Religion and its practice and praxis in Nigeria have had a chequered history. Despite its openness to the general public, religion is still a puzzle and arcane to the outsider. It is perhaps in this light that one can appreciate Isaiah's stunning polemic against unacceptable worship. This paper using the descriptive survey method discovered that Isaiah was disenchanted with false religious practices and unambiguously bemoaned the absence of justice, holiness, righteousness, and mercy. This study reveals that Isaiah One with its stunning poetry, inspiring call for justice, and complex portrayal of God is one of the most memorable chapters of biblical prophetic literature. Accordingly, this polemic against false standards of worship (vv.10 - 17) and an offer of divine forgiveness (vv.18-20) have the potential to inspire rich ethical and theological reflection. This study recommends that the Church should live by example in social ministry; preaching, teaching, and defending the cause of the poor and all those who are denied the right to exist as full human beings. This study concludes that God is not chiefly concerned with cultic prescription and legalistic righteousness. Rather, God's concern ultimately is with our character, attitudes, and relationships.

**Keywords:** Contemporary society, false worship, relationship, social justice, theological reflection.

## INTRODUCTION

A cursory glance at contemporary Christianity suggests that an enormous misrepresentation of Christianity has taken place. The problem here is that for much of the Nigerian Church, the basic understanding of Church, worship, and religion in general has subtly shifted from unmistakable God-centeredness to a disturbing self-centeredness. Maxey and Ozodo (2017:82) explain this as follows:

*The focus has shifted from surrender to God to the cajoling or manipulating of God for the fulfillment of personal desires. Faith as simple trust in a Heavenly Father has turned into inappropriate demandingness, where faith is seen as a tool for obtaining material gain. The primary aim is no longer spiritual transformation and preparation for a holy*

*heaven but rather strategic position for earthly comfort. In short, the Nigeria Church has become worldly-minded and earth-centered.*

Consequently, dedication to God has been replaced by dedication to financial success. There is a palpable decline in the morality of the people as selfishness, materialism, greed, internet fraud or cybercrime, drug trafficking, kidnapping, prostitution, bribery, and the unbridled quest to make quick money (*ego mbute*) held sway.

The following story will serve to illustrate the point. A serial thief was jailed in the United States for consecutive internet fraud and deported twice. The hustler ran back to the illustrious Iwo community of Osun State, and emerged king, using religion and slavish philanthropy as opium. Yet, a lot of people are hailing him. Implicitly, hailing a daylight thief dancing in the palace with a stolen lamp (Odesola,

2024). Apparently, the way many Nigerians argue when issues boil down to morality, decency, honour, and corruption depicts a nation bereft of justice and socio-ethical religious orientation. Bemoaning this moral decadence, Agang (2017) statement is possibly even more revealing when he said that Christians in Nigeria are dancing on the brink of moral and ethical collapse. Ironically, Nigeria is the second most religious and second most prayerful nation in the world, according to a Pew Research Center Survey (Fasan, 2024). Gleaning from the above, it is quite axiomatic that the foregoing is a problem as it was in the era of the prophet Isaiah. In the time of Isaiah, Israel's religious beliefs and practices had domestic effects and raised concerns about injustice and false standards of worship, religious violence, and violations of religious freedom.

In consequence of this, Nigeria like Israel, at present has no space for social justice, equity, and fairness. There is a prevalent perversion of justice in Nigeria where right is called wrong and wrong is called right. It is a winner-takes-all in which the poor and oppressed have little say. This also explains why governments put power above principles. For instance, this is evident in the moral issues of the justiciability of human rights, the sacredness of human life, and the reality of evil in the world, poverty, and ecological degradation. The point of the argument is that through injustice, human capacities, equality, honesty, transparency, and accountability in public offices and projects are vitiated. Perhaps that memorable and incisive remark of the late black American Civil Rights Activist, Martin Luther King Jr "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (Otu, 2014:573) is very instructive. This declaration constitutes the touchstone which vitalises the message of the Church on the desideratum of social justice and human dignity in civilized existence. Ostensibly, it is this absence of social justice and unacceptable worship that has created the necessity for the present study.

In light of this, the issue of social justice and worship has created serious problems for many people thereby raising the following questions. What is the missing link between justice and worship? How can religion function as the conscience of the state? Against this background, since the study involved the investigation of people's attitudes towards a particular aspect of life, the descriptive survey method was used. Here too, the descriptive survey method means a "type of study whose essence is to identify or seek the opinion of a large number of people about events, developments, and proposal" (Onwioduokit, 2000 in Iroanya, 2024:8). Also, since survey signifies the gathering of data regarding present conditions, this study will help ascertain the prevailing conditions and underlying patterns of injustice and false standards of worship in contemporary society. Again, due to the non-invasive research method and the use of quantitative observations and qualitative observations, this study will validate Isaiah

1:10-20 and its call for justice and complex portrayal of God as one of the most memorable chapters of biblical prophetic literature.

This study thus seeks to explore the intricacies of this reciprocal relationship in the praxis and practice of religion and justice in Nigeria. In assessing this dynamic relationship using Isaiah 1:10-20, we hope to further advance the scholarly understanding of how religion affects social justice and how social justice affects religion in Nigeria. This study was developed from secondary sources and participant observation. Materials were sought from textbooks, journal publications, and online sources. The materials were analyzed and then described using different sub-topics. These sub-topics helped in bringing out the main issues that were relevant to the subject matter. This study is divided into five sections. Section one is the introduction, followed by the call and background of Isaiah. Section three focuses on Isaiah's polemic against injustice and false standards of worship. Section four explores echoes of injustice and false standards of worship in society. Section five presents the recommendations and conclusion. This study draws parallels between historical events and contemporary situations to inform its decisions. The findings of this study are varied, diverse, and thorough. This opens the door to the background and call of Isaiah.

### The background and call of Isaiah

Isaiah son of Amos was born in "the middle of Uzziah's long reign (791-740 BC), in an era of apparent stability and relative prosperity for Judah. He seems to have been of aristocratic family" (Payne; 1986:714). Isaiah lived through a pivotal period of his nation's history; the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. He was called to be a prophet "in the year that Uzziah died" (Isa. 6:1) that is, in 740/739 BC (Ridderbos, 1992). The name Isaiah means "Yahweh is salvation" "or the Lord Saves" (Ridderbos, 1992; Donovan, 2010). As appears from the superscription to the book (1:1), he prophesied under Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Isaiah was married and had at least two sons to whom he gave the symbolic names: of *Shear-jashub* (7:3) meaning "Remnant" and *Mahen-shalal-hash-baz* (8:1-4) meaning "hasten plunder, speed spoil" or "quick soot", "fast plunder". Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries (1:1cf. Mic. 1) (Barker, 1985; Payne, 1986).

His ministry was preceded by that of Amos and Hosea (Am. 1:1; Hos. 1:1). At the time Isaiah prophesied, the twelve tribes had coalesced into two kingdoms. Israel to the North and Judah to the South. Isaiah witnessed the downfall and disappearance of the greater part of Israel, the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, leaving Judah as the sole remaining covenant people (Kidner; 1992:588; Donovan, 2010:1). Furthermore, during the ministry of

Isaiah, Judah was enjoying a boom-boom time. Limburg (2001) in Mast (2019) describe it thus;

*Jerusalem just past mid- eighth century BC was a place where the economy was booming, the elite were basking in the prosperity of the Uzziah years, and ecclesiastical institutions were buzzing with sacrifices and songs. But beneath it all, something was wrong. A terrible sickness was eating away at the heart of the nation. Isaiah had seen it, and tried to warn his people before it was too late (p.1).*

Accordingly, it was to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the holy city, home of the Temple, and the place where the people offered ritual sacrifices that he prophesied to. It is no accident that the book of Isaiah was placed first among the books of prophesy. It is the longest book of prophecy and the most important.

In this regard, Ridderbos (1992:524-525) remarks that from ancient times, Isaiah has been considered "the greatest of Old Testament Prophets. He has been called the eagle among the prophets, the Evangelist of the Old Covenant and the like. His book is not only lofty in style and conception but rich in spiritual meaning." Wilmington (1984) notes with uncanny insight that the book of Isaiah may be compared:

*To the Bible. The Bible has sixty-six books; Isaiah has sixty-six chapters. The Old Testament has thirty-nine books; the first section of Isaiah has thirty-nine chapters. The New Testament has twenty-seven books; the last section of Isaiah has twenty-seven chapters. The Old Testament covers the history and sin of Israel, as does Isaiah 1-39. The New Testament describes the person and ministry of Christ, as does Isaiah 40-66. The New Testament begins with the ministry of Jon the Baptist. The section in Isaiah chapter 40 begins by predicting this ministry. The New Testament ends by referring to the new heavens and the new earth. Isaiah ends his book by describing the same thing (Isa. 66:22 cf. Rev. 21:1-3, pp.181-182).*

From the foregoing, the book of Isaiah not only tells us of the condition of Judah in Isaiah's time but also informs us of the condition of our sin and our need for salvation.

Furthermore, the Book of Isaiah leads from the time of Israel's punishment and struggle (chapters 1-39) through to the time of exaltation and comfort (chapters 56-60) (Partain and Dentsch; 1991). Following his call in about 740 BC (6:1), Isaiah's warnings to the kings who reigned in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BC foreshadowed the disasters recorded

in chapters 1 - 39. Chapters 40 - 55 relate to the period of Babylonian power which followed the collapse of Assyria, leading up to the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Persians in 539 BC. Chapters 56 - 66 describe Israel's home coming and their efforts to rebuild Jerusalem and re-establish the true worship of Jehovah in the Temple which was finally completed in 515 BC. This historical background opens the door to Isaiah's polemic against unacceptable worship (vs. 10 - 17) and an offer of divine forgiveness (vv. 18 - 20).

### **ISAIAH'S POLEMIC AGAINST INJUSTICE AND FALSE STANDARDS OF WORSHIP**

In Isaiah 1:10-20, we read that God is formally accusing His covenant people of neglecting holiness, justice, and accepting sin in their lives. Even though Israel was rife with a "permissive attitude and practices of sin, their cultic worship of God was unchanged. They continued to practice the ceremony that they believed was required of them. However, their worship was now perverted and polluted" (Drumrell, 1985 in Perro, 2017:1). Isaiah's alarming indictment concerning Israel's wasted worship is in verses 11-16:

*To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? says the LORD. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. . . Bring no more futile sacrifices, incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moon, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies - I cannot endure iniquity and the meetings. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My face from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourself, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from me. Cease to do evil.*

In verse 17, one finds the source of God's scattering rebuke in previous verses. Here Isaiah declares "learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow." The perversion of justice is the burden of God's complaint through the prophet. This lesson is included in a memorable wordplay. For instance, in Hebrew "justice" is *mispàt*, "bloodshed"; *mispàh*, and "righteousness" is *s'dàqàh* (Payne, 1986). In this brief but intense command, Connor and Revell (2004:55) tersely state that Isaiah reveals the "fuel of God's fiery denunciation. Here he summarizes both the expectation and the failure of God's people in three areas that were foundational for their

relationship with Him and each other." This study will now explore these social expectations with four positive commands.

### **Seek justice**

The first command was for the leaders and people of Judah to "seek justice." Some of the primary principles behind Isalah's use of the term "justice" as well as some key areas of application include right and wrong. God expected justice to be firmly grounded upon moral standards of right and wrong that flowed out of His character. In Isaiah 5:20, God scolded Judah for replacing "good" with "evil", "light" with "darkness", and "sweetness" with "bitterness." The accusation applied to several areas, but especially to civil immorality. Isaiah's prophetic contemporaries, Micah, Amos, and Jeremiah addressed the same issues in both Judah and Israel (Mic: 3:2-11. Amos 5:7 -15, Jer. 5: 24-28). According to Connor and Revell (20024:57-69), the concept of "right and wrong" in this system of social justice includes three elements. The first key principle was fairness. For example, at Mt. Sinai, God instituted clear civil laws to ensure fair business dealings (Dt. 24:14-15:1; Lev. 19:13). However, in Isaiah's time, the justice system saw nothing wrong with the practice of defrauding the poor and confiscating their land (Isa. 5:8-23; Mic. 2:1- 9). Impliedly, what was previously "bitter" was now "sweet".

The second key element was sexual morality. For instance, in Leviticus 18:1-30 and 20:1-23, through Moses, God forbade His people from practising any form of adultery, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality, all of which defied God's natural design. These "detestable sins not only defile the individual involved, they also defile the land. They act and spread like cancer in the entire populace of the land" (Daramola, 2024:90). During the time of Isaiah, the people had achieved an "enlightened" perspective of human sexuality and were no longer enslaved to archaic and prudish constraints that frustrated and repressed their true, inner selves. Astoundingly, Connor and Revell (2005) assert that having liberated themselves from the shackles of religious intolerance, they were free to openly choose and express their sexuality with no fear of religious and civil interference. Hence, that which God had declared "darkness" had become "light." Astoundingly, by skilful comparisons, Isaiah vividly depicts the sexual perversion in verse 9 and subtly underlines the moral cause of the disaster by reference to the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is striking that the charge of gross infidelity to God (harlot, in vs. 21 cf. 3:8-9; 65:3; 66:17); more typical of Hosea than Isaiah is based on social justice, rather than on idolatry.

The final key principle was respect for the sanctity of human life. As God prepared Israel at Mount Sinai, He repeatedly emphasized the value of human life and

established laws forbidding murder (Ex 20:13; 21:12-14, 23-29). God's regard for life was clearly at work when He warned them of Canaanite practices to be despised and avoided at any cost. For instance, in Leviticus 18: 21, God commanded Israel: "Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech." The worship of Molech includes offering infants as burnt sacrifices to pacify and entreat his favour. The practice was detestable to God and He warned Israel to abhor and reject this abomination (Connor and Revell, 2004; Stedman, 2005; Wade, 2006). Nonetheless, it is imperative here to state that King Solomon introduced Molech to the people and began to worship and offer sacrifices to him as well as to other pagan gods and goddesses (1 Kings 11:4-10).

This point is sufficiently significant to be stressed. In Israel, it was the movement and regime of Solomon that decisively shifted the foundations of Israel's life. In the Solomonic arrangement, the quintessence of royal bread is based on three interdependent factors: an economics of affluence (1Kings 4:20), a politics of oppression (1Kings 5:13-18; 9:15-23), and religion of immanence (1Kings 8:12-13) (Bisong, 2003). Accordingly, during the ministry of Isaiah, King Ahaz set a hideous example for the people of Judah by offering his child as burnt sacrifice to Molech (2 Kings 16:3). The practice soon became acceptable (2 Kings 17-17, Jer. 10: 32:35), and future Kings followed in the steps of Ahaz (2 Kings 21:6, 23:10; 2 Chron: 33:1-6; Ps. 106:35-39). Gleaning from the above, this grotesque abomination received legal and religious protection. In essence, that which had been "evil" had now become "good". Therefore, for the people to "seek justice" they would have to return to the standards of good and evil that flowed from the loving heart of God.

### **Divorce the legal process from financial influence**

The second principle at work in Isaiah's emphasis on social justice was in the realm of "gifts" and "favours" for civil leaders. The nature of justice required judges and leaders to distance themselves from the lure of personal and financial gain that could influence these civil and legal decisions (Ex. 23:4-9; Deut. 16:19; 1Sam. 8:3). Unfortunately, in Isaiah's day, the civil structure was driven by greed and acquisition. In Isaiah 1:23, the prophet uncovers political corruption in its rawest form. Those who were supposed to be guarding God's standards of justice were instead chasing after bribes and gifts (Isa. 3:13-5:23). Indeed, there was a direct and deplorable correlation between financial means and legal decisions. This defied God's civil design in which laws and litigation were to be driven by that which was right, not that which was advantageous. Therefore, to "seek justice" meant to divorce the legal process from financial influence (Barker, 1985; Connor and Bevell, 2004). This depicts the situation in the Nigerian society.

## Crime and punishment

The third key principle behind Isaiah's emphasis on social justice concerned the issue of crime and punishment. Quite correctly, Omeregbe (2002:113) has clearly shown that the foundation of social justice is "the fundamental equality of men which demands equal treatment, rights, and distribution of goods, rewards, punishments, rights, and privileges, under normal circumstances". In other words, the very nature of social justice demands appropriate punishment or reward as everybody deserves. But in Isaiah's day, criminals did not necessarily fear the prospect of civil discipline (Isa. 5:8-23, 59:1-9 cf. Mic. 2:1-9). This was a clear negation of fitting punishment for violations of the law that in some situations provided restitution for the victims of crimes (Ex. 22:1-14) or even the death penalty for violators (Ex. 21:12-17; Lev. 20:1-16).

Furthermore, the failure to maintain clear, God-ordained standards of right and wrong, to remove financial influence from the civil process, and to execute appropriate punishment for those guilty of breaking the law, manifests in three broad civil areas (Connor and Revell; 2004). These areas God expected social justice to be "fleshed out" are:

First, God expected all of the civil leaders of Judah to maintain and protect justice (Isa. 1:10, 23, cf. Deut. 1: 9-18; 16:18-20; 17:14-20). These leaders were to uphold justice and righteousness, defend the poor and afflicted. Axiomatically, when justice is maintained and the poor are defended, the citizens are given their rights, then there will be peace and prosperity in the nation (see 1Kings 3). The leaders "will be like rain. . . like showers watering the earth" Psalm 72:6. Rather than protecting justice, the military officers, governors, and kings were among the first to ravage the integrity of justice (cf. Num. 15:18; Deut. 7:17; Ps. 72:1-20; Habk. 1:3-4) (Iroanya, 2016).

Secondly, God also expected judges to dispense justice through their rulings in the cases that came before them. Instead, the guilty were acquitted and the innocent were convicted (Isa 5:23; 29:21). The function of law as an instrument of social engineering was made difficult because judges compromised their oath by acts of omission and commission. Similarly, the Nigerian judiciary is being increasingly compromised. To underscore this, Olisa Agbakoba Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), a former President of the Nigerian Bar Association said "I have lost confidence in what the courts have been doing lately", adding that "facts and law no longer form the basis of Supreme Court decisions"(Fasan; 2024:1).

Finally, God expected justice to be displayed through those who wrote laws and ordinances. Instead, the lawmakers established legislation that was unjust and oppressive to the poor, orphans, widows, and strangers. The point being made is that these social injustices violate the Christian principles of equality, liberty, and reward for

services contributing to the common good. Accordingly, they are manifestations of false standards of worship in the era of the prophet Isaiah as they are in Nigerian society.

## Relieve the oppressed and defend the helpless

The final two commands of verse 17, further illustrate God's loving focus on those who were supposed to be served by justice. Whenever social justice fails, there are victims. God's focus on these victims of justice demonstrates both His concern for them and their particular plight during the time of Isaiah. Tragically, when Judah rejected God's design and embraced neighbouring practices, Connor and Revell (2004:67) strenuously affirm that "God's concern for orphans and widows was ignored. . . this unprotected groups no longer had a legal voice. Their rights to justice were no longer protected and they were helpless under the attack of the ruthless (Isa 1:23: 10:1-2)." These were "the situations which confronted Isaiah throughout his long ministry; a sombre picture of Judah's sins and shortcomings" (Payne, 1986:720). On this score, Isaiah called the people to return to the principles and application of social justice and worship by demanding legal protection for the oppressed, orphans, and widows.

Social justice rightly understood then, is a specific characteristic of justice that is social in character and outlook. Here social relates to human society, living in communities enjoyed or taken in company, relating to or designed for social activities and relating to rank in the community. Applied to the objective of this study, social justice applies to whatever tends to produce and preserve the community's happiness. It is the unity of the whole system, the morals that incorporates the primary values of human action. It is the very measure of civilization. Social justice explains the quality of any human society. This is why Rawls (1971) in Iroanya (2016) conceived justice as fairness. This means fair opportunities for all citizens, maximally directing inequalities in wealth and social positions to benefit the least disadvantaged. This exploration into these social expectations (Isa. vv. 17-18) with four positive commands indicates that social justice and worship will go a long way in entrenching peace, individual, and communal dignity as well as controlling insecurity and war in modern Nigeria.

## ECHOES OF INJUSTICE AND FALSE STANDARDS OF WORSHIP IN SOCIETY

As obtained in the days of Isaiah, echoes of injustice, corruption, materialism, and false standards of worship in contemporary Church and society are obvious and therefore cannot be over-emphasized. It is like the proverbial handshake that has gone beyond the elbow. It

can be likened to a pregnancy that can no longer be hidden under the basket. The catastrophe is phenomenal, the hurt is profuse, and the casualties are many. The stench is strong and the corrosive tendencies are all-pervading. It has become a game without rules, a hurdle with uneven steps. Remonstrating more on the precarious situation, Erumaka (2021:6-7) posits that "today Christianity is practised with incredible hatred and palpable suspicion. It has stained and saturated our pure hearts with murderous tendencies against those that offend us"

It is Maxey and Ozodo (2017) give a graphic description of this disturbing phenomenon as follows:

*The Nigerian revival is losing its cutting edge. One obvious reason for this is that there are doctrinal errors in the camp of those pushing the church forward. A result of this is that the church is in serious danger of losing sight of the very reason for its existence. We are still struggling as a church. . . The Prince of Persia is blocking our prayers and the prayers of the saints in Nigeria for Nigeria. I've never seen a nation awash with so many churches and aglow with so much unrighteousness, corruption and rank hypocrisy - The Nigerian church has lost the credibility it once had within the society. . . Unfortunately, it is now noticeable that a significant segment of the Christian Church in this country is gradually but steadily departing from the basic goals of Christianity. . . The Church is in danger of losing its basic direction (pp. 15-16).*

The above citation is long but is apt for the study. In particular, the Christian religion is now composed of a set of superstitious beliefs showcasing mere rituals at the expense of the priceless sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is now a religious practice that is reduced to mere weekly religious acts which romances with the feelings of its adherents and members. Gleaning from the above, out of many of the excessive religiosity and socio-ethical failures in Nigerian society, the paper will spotlight corruption and indiscipline in the Church and society.

### **Corruption and bribery**

Corruption as a word has been given different connotations and definitions. It is not surprising that there exist numerous definitions of the concept though there is a general agreement that the phenomenon and its associated dimensions are seen as abhorrent, offensive, and antithetical to justice and equity. Sinclair (1992:250) contends that corruption is "dishonesty and illegal behaviour by people in positions of authority and power." The World Bank in Iroanya (2016:192) completes the point

clearly thus "corruption is public office abused for private gain when an official accepts, solicits or extorts bribe to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit." Corruption also occurs through patronage and nepotism, pilfering of state assets or the diversion of state resources. In official parlance, corruption is an act of unlawfully taking possession of what belongs to the collective ownership of the people of the nation or Church. This could be land, property, or monetary resources for personal use. Whether in private, public enterprises, or religious organisations, its presence is felt. Tragically, corruption has become pervasive in Nigeria affecting negatively the social, economic, political, and religious life of the nation.

Significantly, two types of corruption are identified in this study. They are: grand or political corruption and administrative corruption. Political corruption involves the large-scale transfer of public funds for private interests by officeholders such as governors and ministers. This implies the looting of the public treasury. Administrative corruption involves taking bribes from fellow citizens to render a public service. According to a recent survey conducted and published by the National Bureau of Statistics (2024) in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Nigeria's public officials received seven hundred and twenty-one billion naira (721bn) in 2023 and judges topped the list of the recipients (Fasan, 2024). To further this quest the Federal Government (FG) allocation of seven hundred and thirty-two billion naira (732bn) on vague empowerment projects in the 2024 budget will suffice. Ariemu (2024) citing Ayomide Ladipo, the head of Tracka, a subsidiary of BudGIT, has said that Nigeria allocated 732 billion naira on vague empowerment projects higher than the six hundred and forty-six billion, five hundred thousand naira allocated to health projects in the 2024 national budget. In the 2024 Federal Government budget, there are 4, 400 empowerment projects. Previously, empowerment projects were limited to constituency projects, but over the years, they have gradually seeped into capital projects through insertions by the National Assembly. For instance, the National Assembly inserted 7, 447 projects valued at 2.24 trillion in the 2024 budget. Further analysis also showed that over 2, 558 projects worth 624 billion were allocated to agencies outside their mandate.

An example is the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) with the number ERGP20241489. It was allocated five billion naira for the Procurement and Distribution of Official Vehicles to Selected Traditional Rulers in the Six Geo-Political Zone in Nigeria. Another example is the Nigerian Institute of Oceanography and Marine Research (NiOMR) with the number ERGP20245718. It was allocated the sum of two billion, three hundred and thirty-two million Naira to construct a 3.5 kilometres road from Methodist Church Ibu to the Eri River. According to Ariemu (2024:1), the implica-

tions of assigning projects to agencies outside their mandate are that "it undermines monitoring, evaluation, and the sustainability of these projects. These lead to under-delivery and a colossal waste of taxpayers' money and scarce resources". On the other side of the ledger, in 2022, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission acknowledged that corruption by the military was responsible for the degeneration of security in Nigeria. To illustrate this, the following example will suffice. In 2020, a former General Officer Commanding a Division of the Nigerian Army was found guilty of corruption, prosecuted, and recommended for a dishonourable discharge from military service. The court martial found him guilty of diversion of funds set aside for military operations against bandits and terrorists. Over 135 million naira were recovered from him and was returned to the Nigerian Army (Adikuru and Ekeka; 2024).

The point to note here is that the failure to purchase these weapons led to the death of over twenty thousand people including military personnel, over two million displaced persons, and over seventy-five thousand children. In what can be described as a stinging indictment of justice administration in the country, Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi, said the courts are no longer for the ordinary people. The Minister of Justice said that during the groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the Abuja Division of the Appeal Court Complex. According to This Day Editorial Board of July 4, 2024, the Minister of Justice said:

*Gone were those days when the judiciary was regarded as the last hope of the common man. It is the big people now who patronize the judiciary, not even the common man. . . If you have any doubt, the election is approaching, come and see where some people behave like rain-beaten chickens. Forgive me, I do not mean to be rude. The judiciary is no longer the last hope of the common man alone, it is also, or majorly, the last hope of the big shots (p. 1).*

The former Chief Justice of the Federation, Olukayode Ariwoola, the President of the Court of Appeal Monica Dongban-Mensem, and the Nigerian Bar Association President Yakubu Maikyau, were present at the event. Sadly, corruption, inefficiency, and undue influence are some of the ills afflicting the judiciary. Impliedly, from delays in the administration which are the most deliberate acts, to the culture of tardiness and corruption which robs the institution of its impartiality, fairness, and Independence, the problems are legion. Impliedly, the judiciary is the most corrupt institution in Nigeria (Fasan, 2024).

In this case, if bribery, corruption, and "political pressure determine their rulings, what is the future of a country suffused with such judges?" (Fasan, 2024:1). Unequivocally,

Nigeria is a country where the rich and the powerful can get away with anything. There is no doubt that this heinous crime is perpetrated by people who occupy seats and floors on Sundays and Fridays in different churches and mosques. Implicitly, the Nigerian economy continues to be pushed into bankruptcy by unrelenting and unyielding corrupt practices. Poverty is deepening and is being used as a weapon of oppression. Yet, Nigeria is endowed with human and non-human wealth with the latter being exploited every day (Iroanya, 2024). The point to note here is that corruption remains the number one enemy of the Nigerian State. To underscore this, Tella (2024:1) observed that Nigeria "cannot feed itself, cannot provide basic needs like water, electricity, good roads, quality education, and health services after 64 years of Independence." Yet, Nigeria has the largest number of billionaires in Africa in dollar terms and most of them have no factories or enterprises they established to generate output, income, and employment.

Tella (2024:1) concludes by maintaining that "they achieved the feat because they have held political offices or have been busybodies in the corridors of power." In this direction, the Bishop of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Benin Diocese, Rt. Rev. Peter Imasuen has lamented that the Church had been infected with the corruption virus which has eaten deep into the fabric of those in authority. In his sermon in Benin at the Second Session of the 17th Synod of the Church, the cleric insisted that the Church was not left out in the corruption virus as some of those in the Church were also involved in corrupt practices. The cleric speaks about it most explicitly thus "it will be difficult to eradicate corruption in Nigeria because those saddled with the responsibility are themselves corrupt. The religious leaders who are supposed to speak against it are themselves corrupt in words and actions"(Imasuen, 2014:44).

Furthermore, Akiode (1981) in Ogunwole (2006) was so disturbed by the level of involvement of many African Christians in corrupt practices in the house of God that he wrote "Our Churches and their vices." The author expressed his abhorrence thus;

*It is inside the Nigerian Church we cover up matrimonial scandals. It is inside the Church we preach one man, one wife, but have lovers and babies outside the matrimonial homes. It is inside the Nigerian Church we see nothing wrong in husband and wife snatching as long as the offending members remain in the Church to swell the collection tray. It is inside the Nigerian Church we find elders who after committing adultery would make reference to King Solomon as a royal flirt who was loved and blessed by God. It is inside the Nigerian Church we find elders who take advantage of their long association with God to sin*

*deliberately and then ask for forgiveness, believing that God is merciful and would even forgive murder, fraud, embezzlement, victimisation and shameless misuse of power and positions (p.327).*

In view of the above citation, this study notes with dismay that many prophets, prophetesses, pastors, apostles, senior apostles, bishops, and baba aladuras make use of evil and satanic powers to draw large crowds to their churches. Consequently, forms of corruption in contemporary Christianity manifest in several ways.

Against this salubrious background, corruption and bribery in the Church has obviously bedevilled Nigerian society with so many immoralities, ranging from social, political, economic, and religious problems. Just like the soil that covers the land crusts, corruption and indiscipline are now seen everywhere. However, the ability to contend and if possible, avoid them has become courage and sacrifice yet to be made by Nigerians. This is why Llevbare (2012) in Ani (2012) elevates corruption to the rank of state describing it as the 37th state of the federation. According to Ani (2012:251), corruption "has become a state of the Federation, drawing its weekly and monthly allowances from the Federation account unabashedly". Against this background, injustice and false standards of worship in Nigeria are evident in the indiscriminate pollution of the earth with the blood of innocent people, ritual killings, stealing, armed robbery, kidnapping, ill-gotten wealth, prostitution, bribery, and corruption. Others include falsehood and conspiracy, lack of respect, especially for elders, cheating and rebellion, incest and poisoning. The effects of violation of worship and justice are not limited to the disgrace of oneself and family, and guilt. Its effects have transcended family and friends, community and tribe, nationality and international levels.

This led Ogbuchi (2024:511) to observe that "the image of Nigeria has been shattered in the national and international community." This is a result of the rampant violation of Isaiah 1:10-20 by some Nigerians at home and in the diaspora. Again, corruption and indiscipline weaken governance and institutions, making it difficult to address other social challenges effectively. The point being stressed is that corruption is not crippling the Nigerian State because money and profits change hands in an unequal way or because of the participants' motives. However, corruption privatizes important facts of public life, bypassing representation, discussion, and choice processes (Adikuru and Ekeke, 2024). Most profoundly, people deprived of their rights, who face unjust treatment, will fight back and destabilize the nation. Farmers who are not protected but face death from robbers and terrorists, and are held to ransom by kidnappers cannot but desert their farms with resulting famine, inflation, and economic downturn. These are the experiences in Nigeria today (Iroanya, 2022).

### **Witchcraft and idolatry**

Basically, witchcraft is a "satanic power, which operates through divination and sorcery. Divination is fortune telling. Predicting the future is a significant way by which Satan drags people into his net because there is a tremendous, insatiable desire to know the future" (Godwin, 1997:1). Divination can also be found in the Church, sometimes masquerading as prophecy. Sorcery is that which operates through "objects, which become a means through which the supernatural power of Stan is released. Amulets, charms, fetishes, portions, things you drink, and drugs can be counted as sorcery. Sometimes music can also fit into this category" (Godwin, 1997:2). The author offers an illuminating explanation of the concept when he asserts that there are three key words that act as caution flags in identifying witchcraft; "manipulation, domination, and intimidation lurks not far behind. This is the devil's modus operandi. God never manipulates; God never dominates, and God never intimidates" (1997:60).

Notably, countless churches around the country stagger under the weight of their walking wounded. Held captive to the control of a few, these churches resemble a barren wasteland of spiritual bodies scattered over the battle fields of dissention and manipulation. Casualties mount as people disillusioned with the faith find their message rendered impotent, their testimony, powerless. Many Church members, even pastors have been lured into a snare of adultery and fornication and sacrificed holiness to the idol of sexual immorality. For example, Pope Benedict, then Cardinal Ratzinger, shortly before his election in 2005, spoke out about the scandal at Stations of the Cross at the Coliseum. The cleric denounced the scandal when he said "how much filth there is in the Church and even among those who, in the priesthood ought to belong entirely to Him" (Kalu, 2013-64).

Closer home and still on sexual immorality, the Ogun State Police Command on March 2013 arrested Pastor Adekunle Kayade, thirty-four, for conducting a virginity test on a twenty-year-old female member of his Church (Jesus is the Way Evangelistic Ministry, Olorunsogo) in Abeokuta, the state capital using his finger. According to the victim, the pastor was fond of dipping his finger in her private part even when she was menstruating for reasons best known to him. Also, Onatude Oluwasegun, twenty-three, of No. 4 Sheriff Onatade Street Obantoko was arrested for conspiring with the pastor to use the victim for a ritual purpose (Olatunji, 2013:1). There is even dishonesty within the Church, not least among its leaders. One hears of pastors making off with a congregation's collection on the pretext that the Bible says all tithes and offerings belong to the priest. There are evangelists who write to Western donors to report fake success stories in order to bring in more funds (Adeleye, 2011).

Quite recently, someone sent photographs of his ministry centre and outreach points to accompany a

request for funds but it was discovered that he had no connection to the property shown in the photographs. The most worrisome that made a mockery of the pulpit was the case of the General Overseer of Divine Justice Church in Owerri, Imo State, Pastor Clement Ezeigbo, who was arrested for alleged kidnapping and stocking of Indian hemp in his Church (Ani, 2012; Iroanya, 2016). There is no doubt that this lack of justice and worship causes God's name to be blasphemed among the unbelievers (Rom. 2:17-24). What the illustrations attest unequivocally is the fact that homes and churches have been wrecked and many children both physical and spiritual, have suffered a form of death. Overtly, it must be admitted that the aforementioned injustices and false standards of worship are at the root of Christianity without your impact on pluralistic societies today. This clearly depicts the situation in the era of the prophet Isaiah.

### **Indiscipline in the Church**

Discipline in the Church is a necessity because of the Holy and True One (Rev. 3.7) who is in the midst of His people and whose "eyes are purer than to behold evil (Habk. 1:13). The lack of maintenance of discipline and godly order in the Church is evident that it hinders the operation of the Holy Spirit and quenches His ministry" (Campbell; 1990:173). Spiritual death and lack of power in the Church are sure evidences of the neglect of discipline which should be exercised for the honour and glory of the Lord whose house the Church is. Remonstrating more on the precarious situation, Idika Snr. (2007:3) opines that "indiscipline impact reductively on the peace of the Church. Such acts of indiscipline as identified by Idika Snr. (2007:1-8) includes the following:

#### ***Posting of ministers***

Ideally, the posting of ministers should be based on merit rather than sentiments with due regard to competence and ability to fit into the Parish of the Minister's deployment. Where this is not done, it leads to protest and rejection of the pastor by the receiving Parish with attendant embarrassment to the affected minister, leaving trail friction and discord in the Church.

#### ***Lack of firmness in disciplinary matters***

A minister who has breached the rules of the Church should be dealt with firmly and promptly in accordance with the disciplinary procedure. It is improper to relocate an erring Minister without first censuring him or her appropriately, thereby compromising the deterrent effect of sanction.

### ***Lack of investment and monitoring of activities in the parish by church authorities***

The lack of creative ways and means to generate funds through investments to enable the Dioceses, Synods, and General Assemblies to be less financially dependent on parishes undermines better understanding, respect, and harmony in the Church. Also, substantial differences in theological persuasions among ministers tend to create confusion, division, and conflict in the parishes. Needless to say, the lack of relevant organs or machinery for monitoring the teaching, preaching, and practices in the Church to ensure conformity with the doctrines and practices of the Church has led to bold confrontations and brushes. From the foregoing, it is the position of this study that injustice and false standards of worship are the cause of Nigeria's high unemployment rate, the lack of social infrastructure, and the failure of many businesses, and companies.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study examined Isaiah's inspiring call for justice and complex portrayal of his polemic against unacceptable worship of God. As depicted by Isaiah, this paper reveals that God is passionate and emotionally demonstrative rather than detached and reserved. Accordingly, God is not concerned only with "religious" affairs nor with people as individuals in their homes and Church life only. He is equally concerned with the life of society as a whole; with the groups to which we belong as clans, tribes, and nations. He is concerned with the structures and working of society in cities and villages, schools and universities, farms and factories, offices and political parties, co-operatives and sports teams (Couey, 2015; Partain and Deutsch, 1991). Most profoundly, God is concerned with everything we are and do.

Beyond His concern for Judah's civil structure and activities, the paper demonstrates that God has specific expectations of and absolute authority over all governments. In fact, the scriptures bluntly declare that all governments and civil leaders exist because of God and that He has the ultimate source of authority over all governments (Ps. 24; Isa. 2:20-21, Dan. 4:34-37, 5: 18-30; Rom. 13:1). Accordingly, when leaders and followers continue to defy God and consistently reject His standards, their worship is virtually a waste of time for God will not receive it. The implications for the Church and the nation are alarming. When God has revealed His moral priorities for government and when people know these priorities but continually neglect them, their worship, and prayer degenerate into empty, meaningless, and repulsive rituals before God.

A broader search of the Scriptures spotlights that the principle is not merely an Old Testament concept. Jesus

referred to the same principle in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:23-24). Connor and Revell (2004) explain this as follows:

*Our worship is unacceptable to the Lord when there is ongoing, undeniable sin in our lives. Peter made the point to husbands announcing that if they didn't treat their wives properly, their prayer would be hindered (I Pet. 3:7). The New Testament makes the same emphasis regarding an individual's fellowship with God (I Jn. 1:6-9, 3:21-22) as well as a Church's combined relationship with God (Rev. 3:14-22) (27-28).*

On this score, God is interested not only in our vertical relationship with Him but also in our horizontal relationship with others (I John 4:20).

In recapitulation, this study noted that Judah carried out the details of the ceremonial law with meticulous care and at the same time "omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Mt. 23:23). The point being emphasized is that there are many a faithful who fusses about the sheerest trifles and breaks God's law of love, of forgiveness, and of service every day. In this regard, Barclay (1975:235) forcefully states that there is "even many a Church in which the details of vestments, fellowship ritual, ceremonials are attended to with the most detailed care and where the spirit of love and fellowship are conspicuous only by their absence". Accordingly, the paper concludes that one of the most disturbing experiences in Nigerian society is how the human mind can lose its sense of proportion and its inability to put first things first.

### Recommendations

On the backdrop of Isaiah 1:10-20, it is undeniable that Nigeria is socio-ethically sick; yet her malady is not incurable. All she needs is to harken to the diplomatic solution proffered in Isaiah 1:17-20. It is in this regard that the following recommendations are made.

1. This study recommends that the Church in Nigeria should boldly articulate practical and peaceful methods of solving social issues in the country such as corruption, unemployment, religious extremism, and in fact all the socio-political and economic ties that have bedevilled the Nigerian society. This implies using her power management to assume and further her prophetic ministry as she takes on the relative stage of the socio-political life of the nation as the voice of prophetic descent as expressed by the eight-century prophets.
2. Again, the Church should address the vital issues of

social justice, human rights, care of the needy, the elderly, and the environment for the society cannot be healthy without social justice. Society as well will not be just unless social justice is embedded in its core values.

3. More so, the Church and Faith-Based Organizations should deploy maximum genuine resolve to contain all manners of false standards of worship. This implies opening its arms for dialogue and its mind to correct imbalances in the structure and polity as well as imbibe principles of social justice, productivity, and prosperity in the country.
4. Furthermore, the Church and its institutions should ensure that Nigerians' socio-economic rights including the rights to an adequate standard of living, education, and quality healthcare, and clean water are legally enforceable human rights.
5. Consequently, the Church should live by example in social ministry, preaching, teaching, and defending the cause of the poor and all those who are denied the right to exist as full human beings.
6. Nigerians should adhere to the diplomatic solution proffered in Isaiah 1:18-20 by engaging one another in dialogue to resolve our differences. In other words, we need a national round table conference on how best to run Nigeria as our only country.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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