

# Jesus' Condemnation of Corrupt Practices in the Temple (John 2:13-22) As a Recipe for Contemporary Preachers in Nigeria

*Paul Danbaki Jatau*

## Abstract

This article sets out to explore John 2:13-22 to see how Jesus' action in the temple can serve as a recipe for contemporary preachers in Nigeria. His actions are directed against the subversion of religious worship for commerce. This constitutes an offense against God, who is personally associated with the temple. Unfortunately, similar situation takes place in the Church today; the so-called "faith healers" convince people to make huge donations before they receive any blessing from God. God's worship requirements are being used as means for personal profit to line the pockets of the "merchandizers" without regard for God or man. Using the synchronic and diachronic approaches of the Historical Critical Method of biblical exegesis, this article challenges preachers to exercise their prophetic role by confronting the ongoing "commercialization" in the Church.

**Keywords:** Temple, Corruption, Preachers

## Introduction

There is no gain saying that every street in Nigeria is currently witnessing heightened religious activities pioneered by scores of Preachers who purportedly deliver prophecies, miracles and healings. The so-called "faith healers" convince people to make huge donations before receiving any blessing from God. Other groups make merchandise of the people by offering spiritual benefits (indulgences, masses), but they must pay a special fee for the service. Hence, God's worship requirements are being used as means for personal profit to line the pockets of the "merchandizers" without regard for God or man.

Preachers have peddled the notion, to their own advantage, that prosperity and well-being are determined by how faithfully members pay their tithes and offerings; the amount of material possessions that one has is now perceived to be an indicator of one's spiritual well-being. Furthermore, members too who engaged in other corrupt practices in the Church and society thereby hindering the *hoi poloi* from worshipping are offered front seats in Church; recognition is

accorded based on the size of one's tithes and offerings. Unfortunately, these corrupt practices are on the increase and those called to preach remain mute and see nothing wrong. This work sets out to explore John 2:13-22 to see how Jesus' action in the temple can serve as a recipe for contemporary preachers in Nigeria. His actions are directed against the subversion of religious worship for commerce (cf. Mark 11:17; Jer 7:9-11). This constitutes an offense to God, who is personally associated with the temple. Tragically, the very place where God's glory is to be revealed – the temple – becomes the site where his glory in Jesus is rejected by the Jews who down played Gentile worship and carried out practices that do not promote the sanctity of the temple (cf. 1:11; 14; 2:11) (Kostenberger: 2004, 205).

Jesus' action in the temple is found in all the four Gospels (cf. Matt 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48). The Gospel of John places the incident near the beginning of Jesus' ministry, whereas the synoptic Gospels associate it with his passion. It is unlikely that Jesus performed this bold act twice, so the two traditions probably narrate the same event. The Synoptic chronology is the more historically reliable, because it is difficult to see how the Jewish religious authorities would have tolerated such confrontational act at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. John moves the temple scene to the beginning of his Gospel because it serves a symbolic function for him. The temple cleansing in John completes the inaugural event begun with the Cana miracle (Morris: 1995, 269). This work argues that if Christian preachers understand Jesus' action, they would begin to exercise their prophetic role by confronting the ongoing "classism" and "commercialization" in the Church.

### **Temple abuse and exploitation**

The Temple was the focal point of every aspect of Jewish national life. One Jewish source, Midrash on Psalm 91, states the following about the Jerusalem temple: He who prays in Jerusalem is as one who prays before the throne of glory; for there is the gate of heaven and the open door to the hearing of prayer. Local synagogues and schools of Torah in other parts of Palestine, and in the Diaspora, in no way replaced it, but gained their significance from their implicit relation to it. Its importance at every level can hardly be overestimated (Wright: 1992, 224).

The Passover was one of the great feasts in Judaism and it was the dream of every adult Jew to take part in its celebration. Pilgrims from far lands had to fulfill two basic conditions: 1) buy animals from merchants for the ritual sacrifices; 2) pay Temple tax (obligation to be fulfilled by every adult-male Jew above nineteen years of age). The temple tax had to be paid in the shekels of the sanctuary. Hence, Pilgrims needed to exchange their currencies for the acceptable temple coins, and this was taken care of by the money changers who

were performing an essential service for pilgrims and other worshippers. "John's narrative suggests that these necessary and essential services of the merchants and money-changers had 'become oppressive and exploitative'" (Green: 1992, 820), through manipulations. For instance, the temple priests had a way of declaring as unclean the animals that were brought to the temple. This forces worshippers to trade their own animals on what has been considered clean; the consequence of which worshippers are compelled to pay extra for 'clean' animals.

The moneychangers charged a commission for their transaction. The commercial activities of these traders became a flourishing business taking over the Outer Court of the Temple meant for the Gentiles. And as Barclays puts it; the desire for money tends to make people selfish. If they are driven by their desire for wealth, it is nothing to them that someone has to lose in order that they may gain (Barclay: 2009, 148-49). The desire for wealth fixes people thought upon self, and others become merely means or obstacles in the path to their own enrichment. In the plan of God, the Gentiles were not shut out from seeking His face. The Outer Court signified their inclusion. These Jewish folks by their activities were working against God's clear purpose. "What was supposed to be sacred and used to bring people closer to God was being used for evil and separating people from God" (www.bible-story.com).

### **Textual criticism and John 2:15**

There are no serious textual issues except an insertion of *hōs* in verse 15. Some early papyri, such as *p66* and *p75*, have *hōs phragellion* ("as a whip"). For Croy, "as a whip" could be interpreted as something less than a whip, or perhaps not a whip at all. However, it is difficult to account for the wide range of witnesses, including the major uncials, *Vaticanus* and *Sinaiticus*, that don't have that conjunction. For him, *hōs* was accidentally omitted because it would be hard to account for its deliberate omission since that would make the image harsher. On the other hand, the word might have been accidentally omitted through parablepsis, the scribe's eye inadvertently skipping just two letters from the final sigma in *poiēsas* to the sigma in *hōs*, resulting in a reading that, although secondary, was perfectly intelligible (Croy: 2009, 557).

Therefore, Jesus should be described as making something that was "as a whip" (*kai poiēsas hōs phragellion*), and not necessarily a whip per se. For Croy, something less than a whip is added to explain that a real whip is not made out of weak cords. It is certainly possible that *homeoteleuton* was responsible for removing the conjunction, *hōs*. However, there is no reason why a scribe could not intend the opposite of what Croy attributes to that scribe ("since that would make the image harsher") (558). That is to say, it is equally possible that a scribe intended a more benign image of Jesus, and so added *hōs*. If a more benign Jesus

is what the scribes had in mind by adding *hōs*, then it is just as reasonable to posit that the earlier and more “original” reading was the harsher and more violent one.

Bruce Metzger suggests such a possibility when he remarks, “On the other hand, it is probable that copyists introduced the word in order to soften somewhat the bald statement that Jesus made a whip of cords; 'he made a kind of whip of cords'" (Metzger 1975, 202-3). However, even if the earlier reading has *hōs*, that will not necessarily render *phragellion* less of a whip. The conjunction, *hōs*, does not automatically lessen the full and literal identity of what follows it. Therefore, the original presence or absence of the conjunction, *hōs*, is not definitive in refuting the claim that Jesus made a potentially injurious whip. Hence, this study agrees with the Greek text as given by Nestle-Aland (27<sup>th</sup> Edition) is reliable and acceptable as the closer content to the original meaning intended by the author.

### **The text of John 2:13-22 (NRSV)**

<sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!” <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

### **John 2:13-22: its composite unit and structure**

In John 2:13, the scenery description takes us from Capernaum to Jerusalem, a fact that marks the beginning of a new story. At the same time, the transition also connects the present passage thematically to the preceding story of the wedding at Cana (2:1-12). In the explanation of the purpose of the water jars in 2:6, the jars are described as a part of a typical Jewish custom, the cleansing before eating (*kata ton katharismōn tōn Ioudaiōn*). This explanation is similar to the form seen in verse 13 concerning the Passover being “near” (*engus*); this is not simply a temporal marker for the ministry of Jesus, but the social and religious setting necessary for proper interpretation of the entire episode.

In 2:14, the scenery is further centred around the temple, as Jesus is reported to pay a visit to the sanctuary. Thus, from the beginning of the passage, Jesus is described both as a 'Jew' and undoubtedly as a temple adherent. Verse 23 reports that the time of the Passover had come; this further reinforces the Passover theme and making it a frame within which this passage is to be seen. The comments of verses 23-24 also function as transitional remark from the story of the temple cleansing to the Nicodemus story in John 3.

Structurally, verse 13 serves as a narrative context (temporal and geographical) while verses 14-22 resemble a diptych (a double altarpiece on two leaves hinged together). The first scene (vv 14- 17) captures all of the action within the Temple precincts as well as Jesus' address to the crowds (specifically dove sellers). The second scene (vv 18-22) stands as an explanatory conversation between "the Jews" and Jesus, who misunderstand his action and his declaration. The narrating note that the disciples "remember" an Old Testament passage (v 17) and the "words" of Jesus (v 22) close out each panel of the diptych. From the foregoing, this study will use the structure below:

#### *Verse 13- narrative context*

Verses 14-16-Jesus interrupts the commercial activity at the temple

Verse 17- The disciples' reaction (His *disciples remember* another *scripture*: "zeal for your house will consume me" (Ps 69:9)

Verses 18-21- Jesus' exchange with the Jews

Verse 22- The disciples remember Jesus' words, and believe the scriptures (cf. Mal 3:1).

#### **Literary analysis of John 2:13-22**

##### *Verse 13: narrative context*

This verse sets the chronological, cultural and geographical context of the narrative. It introduces not only verses 14-22 but also the entire account of Jesus' initial Jerusalem ministry up till 3:21. *engus ēn* (of time) recurs, always with reference to a Jewish feast (cf. John mentions at least three Passovers: the first in 2:13, 23, the second in 6:4, and the third in 11:55; 12:1) (Metzger:1994,173). The Passover was the most important Jewish feast, commemorating God's dramatic deliverance of the Jews from Egypt.

John's designation of the Passover as being specifically *tōn Ioudaiōn* has also elicited a host of conjectures as to its possible significance (Kostenberger, 104); these at their best however, are nevertheless still merely conjectures. The narrative function of the phrase within the context of the pericope is unaffected by these conjectures and does not require one to imbue it with any particular significance beyond that of pointing to the Passover Feast of Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 16:16 as part of the backdrop against which Jesus' action was

undertaken. John records that Jesus *anabainein to Ierosoluma*. This is a technical phrase for pilgrimage to the Holy City (104).

**Verses 14-16: Jesus interrupts the commercial activity at the temple**

*Kai huren en tō hierō tous pōlountas*. Only John mentions the sale of cattle and sheep, a fact which in the past contributed to the conviction that Jesus intervened on two occasions in the Temple. *Boas (Cattle)* is better than oxen, since oxen might suggest bulls for sacrifice (104). In fact, a bull for sacrifice was rarely required - only for sin of the high priest bringing guilt on the entire people (cf. 4:13-21) but not for a sin even by the civil ruler.

The commercial activity which Jesus found and subsequently interrupted in Jerusalem was taking place *en tō hierō*. *Hierōn* is commonly used of the whole temple complex including the sanctuary, ancillary buildings, and courts (Murray, 1987:37). Here, it is the Court of the Gentiles (the outermost court) that John is referring to (Carson, 1991: 178). If it was the sanctuary proper that was in view, *naos* would have been the word of choice (c.f. 2:19-20).

Two groups of merchants were operating in the temple courts; animal traders who were selling cattle, sheep and pigeons for the temple sacrifices, and money changers supplying the stipulated Tyrian coinage for the temple tax required of every Jewish male age twenty and above. When Jesus found them operating within the temple courts, he made a *phragellion ek skoiniōn* and drove them all out of the temple. This expression is found only in this instance in the New Testament and is not so far attested in earlier writings. It could mean a “whip of cords” or “a whip of rushes” (Morris, 194). The difference between the two however is not to be pressed. Whichever the preferred translation taken, the phrase describes rather, the improvised nature of the instrument Jesus used, suggesting that more than the make-shift whip, it was the force of Jesus' personal and moral authority that drove the merchants out along with their wares (194).

Amidst the commotion of all the action up to this point, the first speech which John records of Jesus is contained in the words spoken to the pigeon sellers (v. 16). These words are important for as Morris notes, they give the reason for his whole action (194). Jesus' indictment against the merchants in the temple courts was that they had made the house of his Father *oikon emporiou* (house of traders). In the synoptic tradition, Jesus justifies his actions by citing Isaiah 56:7 ('my house shall be called a house of prayer') and Jeremiah 7:11 ('not a den of thieves'). In John, the thought is sharpened to 'my Father's house'; the first occasion in this Gospel that Jesus speaks of 'my Father'. The introduction of this term into the narrative presents it as a subtle hint of the source of authority that Jesus has for his action (McHugh, 2009:205).

The motivation for taking Jesus' words as an indictment against opportunistic and oppressive commercialism is perhaps influenced by the Markan indictment that the merchants had made the temple into a "den of robbers". There are certainly historical grounds for accepting that opportunistic and oppressive trade was taking place in the temple courts. As Kostenberger notes, "the temple establishment had amassed excessive wealth in Jesus' day, which made the merchants and moneychangers part of a system that exploited the poor for the purported goal of beautifying and administering the affairs of the temple" (Kostenberger, 106).

Nevertheless, even while this is historically true, Jesus' contention was not primarily over business ethics but the legitimacy of what was taking place in his Father's (YHWH's) house. The merchants had no business of using YHWH's house as trading grounds and the Jewish temple authorities had no right to allow them to do so at the expense and disregard of YHWH's own designs and purposes for its use either. The temple was not their house (it was his Father's) and hence they were not to do as they pleased with it for their own convenience or gain. This is true of the emphasis of John's account as well as that of the Synoptic Tradition, with its "den of robbers" indictment which is conspicuously absent in the Johannine narrative.

Carson notes that even in the Synoptic accounts where in most translations Jesus accuses the merchants and money changers with this particular indictment, the Greek expression does not suggest thievery but zealotry: by setting up in the court of the Gentiles, they have excluded Gentiles who might have come to pray, and have turned the temple into a nationalist stronghold (Carson, 179). It was hence not unethical trade in the main, but unauthorized and unlawful usage of YHWH's house for parochial agendas instead of as a house of prayer for all nations that Jesus was indignant over.

### ***Verse 17: the disciples' reaction***

After giving the "reason" for the act of temple clearing in Jesus' speech (v. 16), John moves on to explicate its "significance" through the disciples' reaction to the event (v. 17). Jesus' disciples "made the connection" (the force of used *emnēsthēsan* in this context) between Jesus' zeal for his Father's house and the zeal displayed by the psalmist in Psalm 69:9.

The verb *emnēsthēsan* occurs only three times in John (2:17, 22; 12:16), and always in this form, the first aorist of *mimnēskesthai*. This is a deponent and reflexive verb meaning to recall, and its subject is always *hoi mathētai autou* (his disciples). The first two texts occur at the start of Jesus' public ministry, the third at its close. If the interpretation given of the Cana episode in 2:1-11 is correct, the use of *emnēsthēsan* here may be an early hint to the reader to be on the watch for

further OT testimonies. The phrase, “*gegrammenon estin*” is the standard formula of Scriptural citation. The function of the quotation “is to characterize Jesus' action and to do so in scriptural terms by linking Jesus with the righteous sufferer thus, “zeal for your house has consumed me...” (Kostenberger, 2007:433) John's quotation of the text contains both an element of messianic fulfillment as well as prophetic prescience.

Firstly, through the citation, John interprets Jesus' temple clearing as having messianic significance, identifying Psalm 69:9 as typological and Jesus' action as a fulfillment of it. As Kostenberger notes, historically, the characterization of one consumed by zeal for God's “house” fits King David. Further, the characterization of the righteous sufferer in Psalm 69:9 and the designation of the psalmist as God's “servant” (Ps 69:17; cf. 2 Sam 7:5) are also congruent with the depiction of YHWH's faithful servant in Isaiah (Isa 50:4-9; 52:13; 53:12) (Ibid)).

John records the disciples' recognition that Jesus in the act of temple clearing was in fact consumed with zeal for God's house as the Davidic sufferer/ servant of Psalm 69 was Jesus' description of the temple as *ton oikon tou patros mou* contains implicit claims of being a Davidic Son as well; claims that would not have been lost on the ears of both the disciples and the Jews. Secondly, John's usage of the future deponent middle *kataphagetai* instead of the aorist of the LXX (*kataphagen*) may represent an interpretation of the Hebrew as a prophetic perfect as well. Kostenberger reasons that “the change of verb tense most likely serves to shine the spotlight prophetically on Jesus' cross-death as it is narrated later in the Gospel. Otherwise, the quotation in John is identical in wording to the LXX, which in turn closely corresponds to the MT” (Ibid)

Jesus' act of temple clearing is hence presented by John as a sign related to his messianic identity and destiny. It is not clear how much the disciples of Jesus actually perceived through the connection they made at the point of the event's occurrence. In the light of John 2:22 however, it could be that while they did make the messianic connection concerning Jesus' identity, the forth-telling significance of the act concerning Jesus' messianic destiny was only fully grasped after the resurrection.

In John's Gospel, the Jews are portrayed as the zealous protectors of the temple, while Jesus is consistently portrayed as the new temple—the locus of the eschatological presence of God. Jesus' action in the temple symbolically enacts the failure of Herod's temple to function as the new temple. The citation of Psalm 69:9 anticipates the role of Jewish zeal for Herod's temple in bringing the full reality of the new temple into existence: in their zealous protection of Herod's temple, they destroy the temple of Jesus body, which through death and resurrection becomes the eschatological dwelling place of God.

**Verses 18-21: Jesus' exchange with the Jews**

*Hoi Ioudaioi* in verse 18 is specific to the “Jewish Leaders” rather than a generic reference to the Jews. Carson identifies it with the temple authorities or members of the Sanhedrin (Carson,180). Unlike the disciples, the Jewish leaders did not accept Jesus' actions as indicative of his messianic identity. Like Nicodemus (3:2) however, they would have at least recognized the prophetic tone of his deed and detected the messianic claim inherent in it. They hence questioned Jesus' authority to undertake such an act on behalf of God by asking him for a sign (*sēmeion*). Morris notes that “their demand arose from the fact that the Jews were a very practical race and that they expected God to perform mighty miracles when the messianic age dawned. Thus their test for a messianic claimant was, 'Can he do the signs of the Messiah?’” (Morris, 97.) The sign the Jewish leaders were looking for however, was presumably some sort of miraculous display performed on demand. This was clearly the “frame” they used to interpret Jesus' reply to their request (v. 19); hence their resulting perplexity at his response (v. 20).

Jesus did not deny the request of the Jewish leaders for an authenticating sign (*sēmeion*) as he usually did. The sign he forwarded was that if (and when) they destroy the temple (referring to his body) he will raise it up in three days. “*lusate*” as Wallace notes, probably has both a conditional as well as an imperational force (Wallace, 1996:490). That in uttering the words *ton naon touton*, Jesus pointed to His own Body, is inconceivable; – for thus both the Jews and His own disciples must have understood Him, which (cf. John 2:20; John 2:22) neither of them did.

The misunderstanding of the Jews led to their incredulity at Jesus' proffered sign. There was perhaps more than one element of negativity in the response of the Jews in verse 20. They were certainly incredulous at what they perceived to be Jesus' claim, but were probably aghast at Jesus' seeming challenge as well. On the one hand, what Jesus seemed to be claiming he could do, was deemed a sheer impossibility. The temple which took forty-six years (and certainly many men) to build could not just be rebuilt by a single person in three days. On the other, what they perceived to be Jesus' challenge; for them to tear down the temple so that he could perform the sign, would be equally preposterous if not sacrilegious as well. It was perhaps this misperception that led some to claim at Jesus' trial (Matt 26:60; Mark 14:57-59) and also at the cross (Matt 27:40; Mark 15:29) that he wanted to destroy the temple and build it in three days. That this was their taunt even at the cross (and not just a charge raised at the trial) gives grounds perhaps for believing that the Jews were not just “cooking up” what they knew to be baseless charges (which they did unsuccessfully attempt at, but could not make to “stick” on Jesus). They really believed that Jesus was seeking to do away with the temple and it was on account of this charge that Caiaphas finally took more decisive action (Matt 26:59-62).

Verse 22: John's editorial comments (After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word)

There may be some significance in John's emphatic placement and use of *ekeinos*. It is frequently used by the evangelists as an adjective, but its use in the singular as a personal pronoun is almost confined to John, and when, outside dialogue, he uses it to express his own words, it carries considerable emphasis. In this context, John may be using it to refer to "the Master"; *ekeinos* would be equivalent to 'He' with an upper case initial. *Elegen*: here, the imperfect may be rendered was speaking---'on the temple of his body' (v. 22) (McHugh, 209).

The force of the emphasis would work to contrast the Jews' misperception with the true meaning of Jesus' words; he was in fact speaking about the temple of his body, but the Jews thought that he was speaking about the temple Herod built. The basis therefore which Jesus offered for his authority to do what he did in YHWH's temple was not "his ability to perform some messianic miracle", but that "he himself in his body, is in fact the true temple", of which Herod's temple was only interim type (Ibid). Since Jesus in his body replaces the temple, or since Jesus in person is the true temple, he naturally has the authority to do what he did with the interim type.

There seems to be two "signs" contained in the pericope of the narrative. The sign of "temple clearing" which reflected the messianic identity of Jesus was accepted by the disciples but rejected by the Jewish leaders. The sign of "raising the destroyed temple" which pointed to that fact that he himself is the true temple replacing the interim type was however, not performed in the scene of this narrative. The Jews did not take up the challenge Jesus posed that day and, in any case, misunderstood what he really meant. Ironically, by the end of John's gospel, they would have indeed destroyed the true temple that Jesus was really referring to and his resurrection three days later would vindicate what Jesus did and said that day. Accordingly, John records the response of Jesus' disciples to the proffered sign when it finally did take place; after Jesus' resurrection, his disciples remembered what Jesus said, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

The phrase, *tē graphē*, by all analogy, must mean the O.T. Scriptures (Ibid). That the resurrection of the Lord is the subject of O.T. prophecy, we find in several passages of the N.T (cf. John 20:9 : Luke 24:26-27; 1 Cor 15:4). At first sight it appears difficult to fix on any passage in which it is directly announced: but with the deeper understanding of the Scriptures which the Holy Spirit gave the Apostles and still gives the Christian Church, such prophecies as that in Psalms 16 are recognized as belonging to Him in Whom alone they are properly fulfilled (cf. Hos 6:2).

The *hote oun* (So when) is a phrase unique to the NT and absent from the LXX, occurring a total of nine times in John's Gospel. As elsewhere in the NT, the Father is the implied agent in Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:24, 32; 17:30-31; Gal 1:1) (Ibid). The disciples believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. The Scripture passage may be Psalm 69:9, as in John 2:17; "Jesus' word" probably refers to the saying in 2:19. Though this is not made explicit here, the disciples' later understanding is aided by the Holy Spirit (cf. 7:39; 20:22).

### **Theological import of John 2:13-22**

Most modern readers have only a vague idea about the central importance of the temple in first century Jewish life, but its significance cannot be overrated. It was the center of spiritual, legal, cultural, economic, judicial and political life of first century Jews (Day, 2005:123). In purely practical terms, the temple was the place for sacrifices and offerings, where priests - representing all Israel - would offer to YHWH a complex series of blood sacrifices and offerings of bread, wine, fruit and incense. The precise nature and timing of these offerings was spelled out in some detail in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Exod 29:1, 35-36; Lev 1:3; 4:2-3, 13-14; 6:5-10, 20-22, 34; -Num 15:45).

However, the temple was also a site of pilgrimage, prayer, and study for all Jews, and, as we shall see, Jesus does much of his teaching in the temple. Most importantly, the temple was viewed as the place where God could manifest himself to his people, and where - in the person of the High Priest - all Israel could come before YHWH on the Day of Atonement to repent of their sins and renew their covenant with YHWH.

There are two Greek words in the New Testament that are generally translated simply as "temple": *hieros* and *naos*. The term *hieros* referred to the entire temple plaza, with all its courtyards and colonnades, which is essentially the same area as the modern Muslim *Haram al-Sharif* ("Noble Sanctuary"). The term *naos* referred specifically to the central sanctuary building which only the priests could enter, and would be more or less the area of the modern Dome of the Rock. Throughout the New Testament, whenever Jesus or his disciples go to the temple, they always go to the *hieros* (Wallace). On the other hand, when the priest Zacharias enters the temple to burn incense, he enters the *naos*.

### **Did the temple need to be purified?**

Jesus was not alone in his belief that the temple had become corrupted and needed purification and reformation. Indeed, the need for the rectification of the temple was fundamental themes throughout Israelite history stretching back to the great prophets and the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah in the Hebrew Bible.

According to Ezekiel and Jeremiah, the corruption of the temple in the early sixth century was so profound that the presence/Glory of YHWH had departed from the temple (Ezek 11:23, 44:4; Jer 7:9-15), leaving it desecralized and ripe for destruction by the Babylonians. Jesus and many other first century Jews viewed the problem of the corruption of the temple in precisely the same way: as a fundamental threat to the existence of Israel. What were some of the objections of first century Jews to the Temple? First, we need to emphasize that no first century Jew believed the temple had become superfluous, and should simply be closed down--and there is no reason to think that Jesus believed this either (but see John 4:21-24). After all, he called the temple "my Father's House," and Christians continued to offer sacrifice and worship in the temple for nearly four decades following the death of Jesus, until the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE (cf. Luke 24:53; Acts 2:46, 3:1-3, 5:20-21).

A major issue was the question of the legitimacy of the High Priests, who were often viewed as cronies and puppets of the Romans who had obtained their office through bribery. Another concern was financial corruption, that the priests were using their spiritual office to enrich themselves and their friends, while oppressing the poor to obtain riches. Many also disputed the details of the proper timing, practice and meaning of the sacrificial rites. Given the tension between Jesus and the High Priestly establishment, it is likely that Jesus agreed with many of these issues. In the immediate context of Christ's purification in John 2, however, two specific problems are mentioned: animal sellers and moneychangers.

### **Objection to animal sellers**

When Jesus entered the temple, he found people selling sacrificial animals (John 2:14). What were they doing there? Jews were required to perform sacrifices at the temple for a number of reasons. Generally speaking, this involved bringing or purchasing an animal, laying one's hands on it, and then giving it to the priests to sacrifice (Talmud, Bezah 20a-b).

Frequently part of the meat from the sacrifice was returned to the sacrificer. The animal sellers in the temple were simply selling the animals needed for these sacrifices. Given the difficulties of bringing the required sacrifices from a distance, having animals available for purchase would have provided an important service for pilgrims. In and of itself, this practice was not objectionable. Jesus was not an animal rights advocate objecting to the very idea of animal sacrifice. Rather his objection was that the animals were being sold inside the temple precinct. There was, in fact, a special market outside the temple called the *anuth* where the sacrificial animals were sold. One problem with selling animals inside the temple was that their defecation and urination could not but profane the temple courtyards. If animals were mixed with

throng of pilgrims it would become inevitable that manure and urine would be tracked throughout the temple plaza. There was a specially designated section of the plaza north of the sanctuary into which the animals were brought through the northern gate. The other problem was that selling animals meant that financial transactions were undertaken in the temple, linking to the next objection.

### **Objection to money changers**

Why were there money changers in the temple? (Neusner, 1989: 287-290). First century Judaism required that all adult male Jews pay an annual half shekel temple tax (Exod 30: 16).<sup>12</sup> This money was used for the maintenance of the temple, and to pay for animals for the daily temple sacrifices made by the priests on behalf of all Israel. Only Tyrian shekels of a specific weight and purity were acceptable for payment of the temple tax (Mishnah, Shekalim 1.3, 2.1). Jesus' objection was again not with moneychangers per se, who filled an important function, but with changing the money within the temple precinct. There were, in fact, special stores had been built into the outer wall of the *hieros* designed for all financial transactions related to temple worship. But these transactions were to be conducted outside the temple. Furthermore, if a person brought ordinary Roman or Greek money into the temple, they were surreptitiously bringing images of foreign gods into the temple. If the money was changed outside the *hieros* precinct, then only the legitimate Tyrian shekels were brought into the temple itself. Changing money inside the temple defeated its purpose, since you had to bring the coins with images of foreign gods inside the temple to exchange them. Exchanging money outside the temple protected its sanctity from images of foreign gods. Exchanging the same money inside the temple profaned its sanctity.

The *Mishnah* emphasizes the tradition against bringing money into the temple: a man "may not enter into the Temple Mount with his staff or his sandal or his wallet or with the dust upon his feet" (*Berakoth* 9.5; see also *Mishnah, Sheqalim*). Thus, Jesus' objection was not to the temple sacrificial system, but to abuses in that system which profaned "my Father's house." Jesus' objection is explicit: "do not make my Father's house a house of commerce" (John 2:16). Jesus did not intend to disrupt and reject temple service, but to purify and correct the improprieties of temple service as practiced in his day. It is quite possible that many of the Jews and even some of the priests who witnessed this purification supported Jesus and his goals. Certainly, Jesus' disciples saw his act as a bold affirmation of the sanctity of the temple, since it reminded them of a Psalm: "Zeal for your house will consume me" (Ps 69:9).

After Jesus' audacious act, he was confronted by some of the temple leaders, asking, and "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" (John 2:18). As

I've noted before, throughout John the Jews ask for signs to authenticate Jesus' claims. The sign they are asking here seems to be a validation of Jesus' implicit claim of authority to purify the temple. Oddly, Jesus did not give a sign or even directly address their question. Rather he makes this enigmatic statement: "Destroy this sanctuary (*naos*) (Coloe, 2001:64-83), and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Notice that whereas Jesus had purified the *hieros*/temple plaza, here he talks of the *naos*, meaning the central sanctuary. John, however, adds editorially that Jesus "was speaking about the *naos*/temple of his body" (2:21), which the disciples only realized after the resurrection (2:22).

### **Preachers and corruption in the Church**

Jesus' action in the temple sets out to show his zero tolerance for corrupt practices in the Church and society. The Church is expected to build on the foundation and legacy laid down by its master, by championing the anti-corruption crusade. Looking around us and evaluating the attitude of contemporary preachers to corrupt practices in the Church and society at large, it is like they have relinquished their primary role of proclaiming the values of Christ's kingdom to embrace the materialistic stand of the society. Some preachers appear to be in the world and in love with the world against the good News; forgetting that each person is described as the temple (*naos*) of God (Beale, 2005:245-253).

As a result of the acquired normative values in the society, some preachers do not feel responsible for the unfortunate conditions of their followers. Some have been seriously infected with the corruption virus. Prosperity preachers today preach that to prosper is to be in a state of abundance, to be in mighty finances where one continues to have more and more. They claim that the real evidence of the blessing of God depends on the amount of material a person possesses.

The commercialization of the gospel has overtaken salvation messages. These "cash and carry pastors", "freelance preachers", "pastors for hire", "emergency pastors", "hungry pastors" (and so on) have given the Church a bad name. They live flamboyant lifestyles like the politicians. They own and maintain private jets ably financed by their Church members who are government workers, peasants and artisans among others. Money bags and favouritism have taken over the Church. Donors of huge amount of money irrespective of the source(s) are being applauded in the Church and given special seats. Small donors are not recognized; they are being alienated and marginalized. This is another form of corruption similar to terrorism operating in the Church.

In certain societies today, the Church tends to keep silent while corruption thrives like the harmattan wildfire. Some preachers and founders' wine and dine with looters of the nation's treasury and celebrate them in their Churches. Many preachers are not courageous enough to correct corrupt individuals in

the society, but they shamelessly share in the loots. Unlike the Old Testament Prophets, like Amos and the courageous and fearless New Testament Prophets: John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, Church leaders are possibly afraid of arrest, imprisonment or even death in the name of preaching the gospel. They want to enjoy the reward of their stewardship here on earth and not in heaven. The current situation in Nigeria in general resembles the proverbial expression: "if you cannot correct them, join them."

### **Jesus' action in the temple as a recipe for contemporary preachers**

Jesus' effort at combating corrupt practices appears commendable and a legacy to be emulated by the contemporary preachers in the Nigerian Church. The Church cannot close its eyes or pretend not to see corrupt practices. It is the responsibility of the Church to see and speak against all social vices in the society. The Church cannot be selective on what social vices to speak against and still claim to be the Church of Christ.

It is important to note and appreciate the fact that the Church, in its history, has tried to contribute to the socio-economic, political and religious emancipation of humanity. In the area of health services, the Church has established several hospitals, leprosarium and the likes. In the field of education, schools have been built by different Churches even to the University level. In the agricultural sector, the Church has institutions to improve the life of the people. The role of the missionaries who provided improved seedlings and fruits cannot be forgotten. In the social aspect, the stoppage of the obnoxious killing of twins in Nigeria by Mary Slessor is still fresh in mind.

Yet, all the above does not seem to be all that the Church can do. The Church should put in more effort in its bid to reach the unreached and treasury looters through evangelization. Like Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, who won a Nobel Prize for peace, the Church today should also endeavor to win the price for combating corruption in our society. However, it will be good if the fight against corruption can start within the Church, by combating its materialistic posture through its prosperity messages and controlling all forms of offerings and illegal tolls collected in the name of the Church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Preachers of the Gospel should not keep silent but be swift at attacking corrupt practices both within the Church and in the society. The attitude of Preachers, romancing with treasury looters, should be to reform rather than rejoice and share in the loot. In other words, Ministers of the Gospel must be willing to ask where and when the status quo of religious practices and institutions has been absolutized and, therefore, closed to the possibility of reformation, change, and renewal.

Jesus had a clear knowledge of his heavenly mandate and the authority behind that mandate. The whip was an emblem of authority and also for the purpose of driving the cattle which had been brought there for sale" (Barne, [www.bible-cc/John/215.html](http://www.bible-cc/John/215.html)). Preachers of the Word have a divine mandate to change the society. This mandate cannot be exercised without a transformative and cleansing act on the Church. With many hypocrites who are ready to exchange integrity with money or sell their conscience for political appointments it becomes very difficult for those called to preach to carry out their divine mandate in Nigeria. Preachers are challenged to take bold steps to clear the church of its cogs in the wheel. With the mandate is the responsibility of exercising the authority for the shaping of human lives and society. "Where the Christian service is mainly interested in the spiritual... without interest in the socio-political integrity and governance... it becomes an incomplete service and un-Christian" (Ituma: 2009, 49)

Furthermore, Jesus could as well have gone into prayers for God to forgive the money changers and to change their heart. This action of Jesus makes non-sense of the position of some individuals who think that all problems must be resolved in prayers. In the first place, if one is hungry the one does not need to pray to God to remove hunger. What one needs is to take some food and that will satisfy the one. It does not make one very spiritual at that point to pray but only shows how naive some people could be at some points. Jesus wants to teach that there are many practical ways of resolving problems and Christians must note that. Sometimes Christians think that it makes them more spiritual to remain aloof to societal problems and resort to prayers. While prayer is necessary the Christian must understand that taking proactive practical steps in challenging ills in the society is exemplified in the action of Jesus. If using the cord defines violence then God would have commanded violence when he says, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Prov 13:24). The second part of the verse implies that love is exemplified in the rod.

### **Conclusion**

Every element of the temple commerce, whether sacrifice, banking or the coins involved, offers some rationale for the actions of Jesus. Taken together, the composition is striking and offers more than enough reason for Jesus to enact his parabolic intervention. In driving out the merchants and bankers, Jesus does what the high priest, in the interests of maintaining holiness, should have done, so there is an implicit irony there – which is mirrored in Jesus' reference to the House of Prayer. The High Priest has chosen Mammon, instead of God. In his greed, he has chosen silver over obeying the Decalogue, with dire consequences for ordinary peasants. That the payment of the coin is tied to the daily sin offering comes close to religious blackmail.

Because of the threat of potential merging of God and Mammon, in a form of priestly hegemony, we may speak of a sense of dissonance, which, I believe, the actions of Jesus sought to create. The mark of this dissonance was the division between insider and outsider which arose from the implied and explicit irony and the enacted parable which accompanied the spoken words of Jesus. Like the prophets of old, Jesus sought to drive a wedge between the essential symbolism of the temple as the House of God and those who used the temple to further their own commercial interests, to the detriment of the ordinary peasants.

In spilling the idolatrous coins on the ground Jesus does what any righteous Jew should have done. At this point, Jesus resembles Elijah standing face to face with the prophets of the Tyrian Baal introduced by Jezebel. This is Jesus' personal Mount Carmel, presaged by the transfiguration perhaps, as he upsets the tables and the unholy coins of the Tyrian Baal-Melkart roll across the dusty floors of the temple. Bearing in mind the Mishnaic rules (m Sheq 7:1) about dropped coins, perhaps some of these coins even ended up in the poor box (Freewill gifts m. Sheq 7:1; cf. Mark 12:41).

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