

## **The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria: A Muslim Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

*Corruption has become a cankerworm, which has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. It has established itself in all spheres of the socio-economic and political realms of the nation. Instances of it have been acknowledged at international and global levels that innocent Nigerians are being exposed to intensive, rigorous scrutiny before being allowed to enter other countries, as if every Nigerian is a potential corrupt individual. In all honesty, some steps have been taken and are being taken by governments to check the menace of this obnoxious practice. Such include the 1979 Ethical Revolution, the War Against Indiscipline (WAI), the MAMSER, the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), and of recent, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). It is however our observation that the anti-corruption crusades have not accorded religion its expected roles in this direction. The non-recognition of religion as a viable instrument in the fight against corruption in Nigeria, has been responsible for instances where religion itself is being used to perpetrate it. This paper therefore intends to draw the attention of the Nigerian leaders to the relevance of religion in the fight against corruption and the imperative of integrating it in this crusade. Suggestions would be made on the modality for effective integrating religious virtues into the programme of fighting corruption from the perspective of Islam.*

### **Introduction**

In his *Social Justice and Leadership Responsibility in Islam*, Shehu (2007) identified how the African warlords of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries built up wealthy kingdoms by selling millions of virile people to the Europeans in the

### *The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria*

Atlantic slave trade. In the same vein, Walter Rodney (2005) in his *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* identified this as a major means through which Europe subjected Africa to abject poverty, ignorance, hunger, diseases and wretchedness. With the eradication of this obnoxious trade, Africans seemed to have had a sigh of relief, not knowing that a sort of neo-slave trade, which drains African resources and reduces her citizens to penury and impoverishment through looting, plunder, money laundering and financial mismanagement by those in the echelon of power will take over the scene.

Apart from the above, Nigeria has proved that poverty alone is not a bane to national development, but that excessive natural resources too can be. This is because in spite of the abundant resources with which Nigeria is endowed, its level of development does not measure up with her natural resources. It has little to show for her fertile land which is good for both cash and food crops and her high potentials for industrial and economic development. The discovery of crude oil is an additional advantage to the country and this serves as her major foreign exchange income. In spite of all these divine blessings, it is sad to note that the country is scored low in terms of human development. In spite of her natural endowment and resources, most Nigerians are still languishing in abject poverty. The problem with Nigeria is not only that of non-exploitation of her natural resources, but also that of under-utilization and mischievous embezzlement of public funds and other corrupt practices which permeate all sectors of the country. The extent and alarming rate at which corrupt practices had permeated every fabric of the nation's sector is aptly put by Shehu (2006) who writes:

Corruption and fraud as acts of criminal and betrayer of trust, in all their forms and manifestations, have not only been perfected in Nigeria but have become the order of the day – a means of earning a living. Though, not legally institutionalized, fraud and corruption have certainly been tacitly approved and conventionally legitimized. Fraudsters and corrupt public figures have become celebrities just as they have been hailed as heroes. Conversely however, trustworthy and credible persons have almost been ostracized and condemned. The society is far from being upright, normal and balanced, because all sectors of our national life have been penetrated and influenced by fraud and corruption (Sunday Triumph, Sunday, December 24, 2006).

From the above, it can be said that corruption as a social menace, has become so popular that some economists see it as a means of improving the efficiency of productivity, especially in highly bureaucratic institutions where bureaucrats are seen as being hostile to innovators and bribery is seen as the opportunity for innovators to obtain government licenses and permits. However, it will be short-sighted to restrict corrupt practices to the national life alone as this obnoxious practice also permeates the socio-political and economic lives of Nigerians as well. So, it reflects at interpersonal, inter-group and partnership levels.

It needs to be stressed that nothing can thrive in the face of corrupt practices. Some instances in Nigeria can be used to prove this. The Nigerian National Supply Company (NNSC) was established in 1972 with the purpose of fighting inflation and ensuring even distribution of goods which it was authorised to import. As laudable as this project was, it was rendered useless by corrupt officials in charge. It was reported that goods worth some N6.9 million (as at then) disappeared into thin air between the wharf and the company's warehouses. This happened after the Government Coastal Agency had cleared the Company's tyres and goods and loaded them into forty-seven trailers. It was said that twenty-seven of the trailers carrying fifty-two containers disappeared and nobody could trace the where-about of the trailers. At another instance, the corrupt practices in Nigeria have been internationalised. Amoloye, (1984) cited a report of how an Indian businessman Rajendra Sethia connived with some officials of the Nigerian National Supply Company to hike the price of sugar shipped to Nigeria by 1,000 percent. It is therefore quite unfortunate for a Nigerian to connive with foreigners to inflict untold hardship on the Nigerian populace just to achieve his own selfish end.

Amoloye (1984: 17) further observed that corrupt practices are escalating yearly in Nigeria. Citing cases of inflated contracts as part of corrupt practices, he writes:

Inflated contracts were awarded all over the place. Though this problem has been in existence, at least, from the First Republic, it reached its pinnacle during the Second Republic. For instance, a contract was awarded for N329 million, to an overseas company at Ajaokuta Steel Mill. The Nigerian agent got N24.6 million as commission and he was expected to pay those in power a substantial part of this sum in order to defray their

*The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria*

party's 1979 election expenses. It was even reported that 'palm greasing' was necessary before the national legislators could carry out their normal functions for which they were elected. One big shot, in an attempt to have his ministerial nominee sail through, is reported to have told another political chieftain that 'You better get N200,000 ready for this operation. The Senators are very anxious to get something for Christmas.'

As an addendum to the above, Oladosu (2005: 64) cited the case of an innocent Nigerian contractor who won a contract and was directed to a storekeeper, who pointed at four or five cartons lying on the floor and advised him: "you do not have to purchase any of the items or materials. All you need to do is to carry away these cartons and bring them back after two weeks. There and then, we shall pay you  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the total amount of the contract and we shall take the remaining  $\frac{2}{3}$ ." From the above, it can be inferred that corruption is multi-faceted and it spreads its tentacles to virtually all aspects of human life. Viewing corruption in the Nigerian context, Marquette (2010:25) cited Smith (2007:5) to have submitted that:

.....when Nigerians talk about corruption, they refer not only to the abuse of state offices for some kind of private gain but also to a whole range of social behaviour in which various forms of morally questionable deception enable the achievement of wealth, power, or prestige as well as more mundane ambitions. Nigerian notions of corruption encompass everything from government bribery and graft, rigged elections, and fraudulent business deals, to a diabolical abuse of occult powers, medical quackery, cheating in school, and even deceiving a lover.

The above therefore suggests that corruption is manifest in all spheres of life and so all hands must be on deck to fight it. In fairness to various governments in Nigeria, many attempts have been made to sanitise the nation off corruption. That notwithstanding, a lot still needs to be done for these efforts to achieve their major goal.

## **The Crusade against Corruption in Nigeria: An Historical Overview**

The journey to fight corruption is synonymous to the independence era of Nigeria. As soon as the colonial masters left the land of Nigeria, a clear manifestation of corrupt practices started to reveal in every sector of the public offices. One begins to wonder why Nigerians have been so engrossed in corrupt practices right from the First Republic. Isaac Olanrewaju of the Institute of Adult Ethical Education and Leadership Training Centre has shed light on this, when he traced the history of corruption in Nigeria to the nation's colonial era. Delving extensively into the *Anatomy of Corruption in Nigeria* of Bolaji (1970), he cited him to have revealed that:

Corruption of office in Nigeria goes back to the colonial era when the messenger collected bribes from the illiterate people before he allowed them to go in to see the District Officers and when the interpreter received his kola in order to present the illiterates' cases before the expatriate dispenser of justice. Being the nearest men to the then corridors of power, the messenger and the interpreter wielded great influence. Later came the council clerks and court clerks of the Native Administrations many of whom succeeded only too well in the perversion of the course of justice. Finally, as the expatriates withdrew from political and administrative power, indigenes stepped into their shoes and many of them began to revel in their new-found power (Olanrewaju, 2007: 448).

Our observation from the above statement is that those who then served as messengers and interpreters for the colonialists were no other people but Nigerians who used the opportunity they had to serve under the colonialists to exploit their brethren. These set of people later begot none but wicked corrupt people who in turn started to operate corruptly at accelerated rate.

It is interesting to note that both military and civilian governments in the country, in their bid to fight corruption have been taking some steps. Right from the First Republic, the Sutton Tribunal of Enquiry was set up to probe the allegation of misappropriation of funds of the African Continental Bank levelled against the leadership of the First Republic, while the Coker Commission of Enquiry was set up to investigate the allegation of unwholesome conduct of the Action Group over the finances of the National Investment and Properties Ltd. Major General Aguiyi Ironsi in his broadcast

### *The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria*

to the nation on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 1966 publicly declared that “the National Military Government will stamp out corruption and dishonesty in our public life with ruthless efficiency and restore integrity and self-respect in our public affairs (Ojiako (1983: 2). The Murtala Muhammad’s regime also set up a committee to investigate alleged corrupt practices of some governors under Gowon’s military administration. It is sad to note that only two out of the then twelve governors were exonerated. Those found guilty were made to forfeit some properties unlawfully acquired by them, while over 11,000 public officials were said to have been summarily retired.

Still worried by the alarming rate at which Nigeria is grossly swimming in the ocean of corruption, President Olusegun Obasanjo in his usual characteristic manner vowed to fight this menace, saying: “Transparency International awarded the world cup in corruption to Nigeria as the most corrupt nation of the world, yet we aim at putting an end to corruption in Nigeria and there will be no sacred cows” (Ojebode, 2008: 211). This also confirms the submission of Clinton who drew the attention to a World Bank study that reports that “Nigeria’s corruption and related problems has cost the country about 300 billion dollars over the past three decades” (Saturday Punch, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2009: 2).

The anti-corruption crusade became more pronounced during the tenure of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. On his assumption of office, the President vowed to fight corruption which he saw as a bane to sustainable development. In his words, he said:

The impact of official corruption is so rampant and has earned Nigeria a very bad image at home and abroad. Besides, it has distorted and retrogressed development. Corruption, the greatest single bane of our society today will be tackled head on; no society can achieve anything near its full potential if it allows corruption to become full blown cancer, it has become in Nigeria (cited by Malik, 2004: 40).

A bold step to transform this into practice was taken when he signed into law the Anti Corruption Bill and consequently established the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) to stamp out bribery and corruption in the country. This step is a right step in the right direction as it helps in breaking the monopoly of power in the hands of public officials and the more discretion they are given in the decision making process with little

or no accountability. To drive home this point, in his keynote address at a one-day seminar on “Curbing Corrupt Practices Through Religion” the Chairman of the ICPC, Hon. Justice Muhammad Mustapha Akanbi (rtd), reported that the Chief Judge of Akwa Ibom State, a customary Court of Appeal Judge in Delta State and a Chief Magistrate were arrested consequent upon the fraudulent roles they played in an Election Tribunal they participated in (Arikewuyo & Ahmed, 2005: 22).

Ever since its establishment, the EFCC has also been able to curb to a large extent, the menace of corruption in Nigeria, as it has brought to book a considerable number of corrupt public officials. Suffice to mention here is the case of the ex- Inspector General of Police Mr. Tafa Balogun who was said to have been involved in financial scandal to the tune of N13billion. Some State governors were also impeached for financial recklessness. Chief Diepriye Alamisyier of Balyesa State and Joshua Dawiye of Plateau State are good example of this. The immediate past governors of Ogun, Oyo and Nasarawa States – Gbenga Daniel, Adebayo Alao Akala and Alhaji Aliyu Akwe-Doma were arrested by the EFCC in October 2011 for alleged misappropriation of public funds of N58 billion, N25 billion and N18 billion respectively. Also, Senator Danjuma Goje, the immediate past governor of Gombe State was declared wanted by the EFCC over allegations of mismanagement and diversion of over N52 billion state funds (<http://www.huhuonline.com/index>, accessed 9/10/2011). However, to ensure better performance and to take the crusade against corruption to the grassroots, it becomes imperative to explore the religious realm as a strategy for solving the problem of corruption in the nation.

The failure of various steps to curb the menace has led to various other measures to bring to book corrupt officers in the society. A Professor of African and Comparative Religion, Adelumo Dopamu, has recommended death penalty for any corrupt individual using a magical gong called *agogo eewo*. In his own words, he suggests:

One last point as recommendation. In the traditional Yoruba society, there was the concept of *agogo eewo* (the forbidden gong). When it was sounded, criminals, people into fraud and corruption, evil doers, adulterers, law breakers and robbers shivered with terror because they would die soon. Nigeria needs *agogo eewo* today. It should be taken to the ministries, institution, financial houses, military headquarters, police headquarters,

### ***The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria***

National Assembly, Government Houses and other places instituted to prosecute victims of financial mismanagement, money laundering, fraud and all form of corruption. *Agogo eewo* did not spare anybody, whatever your culture, Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba. With *agogo eewo*, sanity will return to the society, corrupt practices will reduce and insecurity will be a thing of the past. Let us sound *agogo eewo* (the forbidden gong) in Nigeria (Dopamu, 2009: 62).

The above statement of the learned Professor expresses the concern of Nigerians to proffer religious solution to the menace of corruption in the society. However, this information about *agogo eewo* seems to be a mere threat to frighten one from unlawful activities, or else the professor should be able to furnish us with information as per where the *agogo eewo* is kept, who is going to sound it and from experience, when last was it sounded, for us to appreciate more the efficacy of the magical instrument in checking corruption in the society. That notwithstanding, we sincerely hope that corrective measures need to be institutionalised to check corruption and not by paying only lip service to it. If all these fail, then punitive and deadly measures need to be given a thought.

### **Justification for incorporating religion into anti-corruption crusade in Nigeria**

Religion has been considered a powerful and an effective mechanism of gaining massive support from the populace. A good working relationship between religious leaders and those in power would assist the nation to achieve most of her national objectives. The combination of power and religion therefore becomes an essential ingredient for national unity and development. To attain this height therefore, there is the need to give religion its proper role to play in the lives of its adherents.

Nigerians are religious to the core. Their religiosity is constitutionally confirmed in all its ramifications. Though, the nation is a multi-religious nation, it puts itself under God and commits the rulers of the nation particularly the President-elect into the hand of God by asking them to seek God's help with the sentence "So help me God." It is important to note that many of the political office seekers seek succour in religion by contacting 'men of God' for spiritual assistance. If the Head of State, President Goodluck



Jonathan could kneel down before a man of God and allow him to place his hand on his head, then one can appreciate how Nigerians rate men of religion. Should such a nation allow religion to permeate its activities and programmes, it will have positive effects on that nation. If religious leaders are therefore given the opportunity to have a say in such a project of fighting corruption, one is sure that more achievement would be made in this direction. But where religion is only reduced to mere rituals and allowed to surface only during national festivities, its impacts may be minimal. Leaders will be moving against the conscience of the people they rule should they close their eyes to religion and reduce it to mere personal affair. As personal as it is to those who profess one, policies of the rulers ought to allow it to have a say in national issues, as individuals constitute the nation. In short, the conscience of the people ought to be carried along in government policies for it to achieve the set objectives. The statement of Mawdudi cited by Zafaran (undated) is relevant here. He says:

It should be clear to us that no nation becomes really strong or could achieve any great progress in any field, if it is involved in a perpetual conflict between the conscience of the people and the policies of the rulers. Even if such a nation is compelled to tolerate its rulers, it cannot be expected to give them its wholehearted cooperation, and the people's non-cooperation and resentment might become a source of danger to the state itself. A nation can develop and progress only when there is complete harmony between the conscience of the people and the policies of the government.

From all indication, the rate at which adherents of religion patronise places of worship is all-embracing, as it spares no segment of the nation. In fact it is a means of getting to the grassroots as the places of worship become an avenue for them to listen to moral talks. It therefore implies that should this medium be properly harnessed, the fight against corruption would be taken to the grassroots where the nation's leaders hail from. It is interesting to note that the Chairman of a Local Government in Osun State went to a church for a thanksgiving ceremony for winning an election generally believed to have been massively rigged. To the surprise of the congregation, the officiating minister in the church refused to honour and admit the said chairman and his entourage who came to felicitate with him into the church on the basis that he got to the position through fraudulent means. If all Churches and Mosques

### *The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria*

could be doing this, individual leaders would think twice before they do what will tarnish the image of their family and that of their religion. Non-recognition of religion as a means of checking corruption has been exploited by unfaithful corrupt leaders who flock places of worship for thanksgiving, and as well donate heavily for them to silent religious leaders. This scenario is aptly explained by Pastor Tunde Bakare and reported by Kunle Eso in the *Punch* of Monday May 7, 2007 when he writes:

Pastors don't often care where their people get the money. Just bring it and let life continue. How many pastors ask for the source of the money followers give? Most of these treasury looters and robbers sit in front row of our churches and donate the largest amounts and pastors don't care....

It is our observation that the nation is spending much on religion. Governments at all levels do spend exorbitantly to send Muslims and Christians on pilgrimage to holy places annually, in addition to the fact that the Federal Government donated millions of naira each to Christians and Muslims to build National Church and National Mosque in Abuja. In our own view, this effort underscores the importance of religion in the Nigerian society and the essence of religion to shape the life of the Nigerian citizens for better. If such an effort is put in place and religious leaders are not given the opportunity to contribute their quota towards solving the problem of corruption facing the country, then one will start doubting the sincerity of the government on the money spent on religion.

The effects of corruption know no boundary. Every citizen has its share of the outcome of the practice. Oladosu (2005:66) identifies some of the repercussions of corrupt practices to have included economic stagnation, under-development, huge external debts, political instability, violent clashes, social unrest, compounded poverty, apathy, lethargy, depression, disillusionment, hopelessness, lack of patriotism and restlessness. Stressing this further, he writes:

The above has invariably precipitated further degeneration of human values and the spate of crimes including drug and human trafficking, rape, political assassination, armed robbery, thuggery, vandalism, cultism, unnecessary ethnic conflicts, unjustified military interventions, religious confrontations, with the attendant potentiality for civil wars and secessionist

tendencies.....It has ruined the country's image and reputation and forced some "patriots" to conceal their real identity and nationality in order to avoid suspicion, embarrassment, humiliation and possible repatriation.

Apart from the fact that honest people will lose their rights if they refuse to engage in corrupt practices, poor people who have no money to bribe their ways will equally continue to lose their rights, and so corrupt people will continue to rule the nation. In such a case, religious leaders too need to be allowed to participate in this crusade, so as to salvage the country from perdition. Where they remain indifferent, the country stands the risk of losing her honest citizens to join the train of corrupt people, as it is easier for an honest person to become dishonest just as it is easier for a hot charcoal to easily dissolve in ashes than for ashes to become charcoal.

Also, the scripture contains moral virtues like justice, sincerity, love for goodness, accountability, truthfulness, trustworthiness and equity. These are no doubt necessary ingredients for curbing corrupt practices in the nation. It also frowns at such vices like selfishness, egotism, love for supremacy, and others which aid corruption. A forum for the consideration of these ethical virtues and unethical vices therefore becomes necessary for the bodies which are in the fore front of fighting corruption in the country. Conscious religious practitioners also need to be involved in the struggle as well, so as to harness their wealth of experience for the purpose of fighting the plague of corruption in the nation up to the grassroots. Flavin and Ledet (2008:3-4) substantiate the expected role of religion in curbing corruption when they write:

Most religious traditions advocate abiding by civil law and avoiding illegal activity that benefits one privately at the expense of the community or common good. If government officials are drawn from the population at large, we expect more religious officials to hold public office in states with higher levels of religiosity and that these officials will be less likely to engage in illegal (corrupt) behavior while in office.

The word *fasad* is used extensively in the Qur'an to connote corruption. It is used to depict abuse of public office for private gain and financial prowess. To be precise, the Qur'an condemns those who use their authority to spread corruption and mischief on land, bestowing benefits on a group and

### *The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria*

oppressing others on the basis of racial discrimination (Qur'an 28: 4; 89: 10-12). The Qur'an preaches and teaches some moral values to ensure a corrupt-free society and it apporions appropriate punitive measures to those caught in the action. Islam also sees the fight against corruption as a joint responsibility in which religious leaders should play significant role.

Another word used to connote corruption in Arabic is *rashwa*, which is an Arabic word for bribery, corruption and dishonesty. Such acts as accepting gifts, outright theft of public funds, and undermining rules in exchange for bribes, on recommendation or due to family or tribal considerations are considered as abuse of trust placed in officials by the state, and are so reproached in many Traditions of Prophet Muhammad. To substantiate this, the Prophet likens indifference to corrupt practices to the case of a group of people in a ship who decided to keep silent while one of them was attempting to punch a hole on the ship. The silence meant destruction for all of them on board. The spiritual implication of this attitude is equally stressed by the Prophet when he said:

O Muslims! Allah has commanded you to introduce people to good deeds, and prevent them from abominable acts; otherwise a time will come when you will pray to Him but He will not listen to you; you will ask your needs of Him, but He will not grant them; you will demand His help against your enemies, but He will not help you (Ibn Majah, cited by Zakariyyah, undated, pp.14-15).

The Qur'an contains the history of virtuous men and women who led virtuous life and so their names remained indelible in the scripture. In the same vein, the outcome of those who led corrupt life as well as the fate suffered by looters of public funds is found in the Book. Not this alone, there are Qur'anic measures put in place to safeguard public funds from being misappropriated and the punishment for those found guilty of such an offence. In Islamic history, there are personalities who had ruled the Muslim empire successfully and were not found wanting in their administration. Such personalities include Abubakr as-Siddiq, Umar b. al-Khattab and Umar b. Abdul-Aziz, to mention but few. For instance, it is on record that Caliph Umar b. al-Khattab ensured declaration of assets of public officials and would not hesitate to confiscate partly or wholly whatever they acquired through misuse of office. These are leaders worthy of emulation for politicians and public officials in Nigeria. However, the politicians and public office holders have no access to this vital

information, as they have contact with religious clerics only when they need spiritual assistance either to win an election or a court case. They pay little attention to issues bordering the trust they have by having access to public funds and so they loot it because their conscience seemed to have died while they are still alive. The basis of using religion to fight corruption is further stressed by Marquette (2010:1) when he writes:

The basis for the increasing attention given to the religion-corruption nexus stems from the argument that fairness and honesty form the basis of many religions, and as such, religious leaders may be utilised in the fight against corruption. According to Douglas Beets ...two apparent assumptions underlie rising interest in harnessing religious leaders and groups to support the fight against corruption. The first is that faithful adherents to religion will refrain from corruption because of the inherent theft, dishonesty, illegality, and mistreatment of others (it implies). The second related assumption is that those who are not faithful adherents of religions are more likely to engage in corruption because of an absence of religious guidance.

Alluding to the above statement, Marquette (2010) observed that contrary to the Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index which established that most corrupt countries in the world also rank highly in terms of religiosity, respondents in Nigeria and India strongly felt that religion should make people less corrupt and should impact upon their behaviour and attitudes. It can therefore be considered a religious obligation to join the anti-corruption crusade of the EFCC and ICPC. As God is not ready to change the condition of a nation unless the people are ready to change their attitudes (Qur'an 13: 11), it becomes imperative therefore to involve the civil society and particularly religious leaders and preachers in the process of fighting this obnoxious practice which has eaten deep into the fabrics of the nation.

### **The constraints of using religion to curb corruption**

Flavin and Ledet (2008) carried out an empirical research in the United States of America, on the prediction that more religious populations would have lower levels of corruption. The research revealed that there was little relationship between religiosity and corruption and that religion does not seem to directly "purify" government corruption in the American States. This finding seems to have contradicted our assertion on the effectiveness of

### *The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria*

religion as an instrument to curb corruption. However, its relevance lies on the fact that religiosity does not imply mere going to places of worship or littering public places with posters and magnificent signposts and structures. The reflection of the teachings of a religion on the value and attitudes of its adherents is a strong determinant of one being religious. Take for instance; observance of the daily obligatory prayers of a Muslim may not make him a true Muslim if the prayers have not influenced him positively by driving him away from act of indecency and indiscipline (Qur'an 29: 45). In the same vein, his fasting may not hold water if it does not lead him to piety, which of course is the essence of fasting (Qur'an 2: 183). The case of people attending places of worship and not allowing the teaching of their religion to influence them morally is like a sick person who attended a hospital but refused to yield to the advice and prescription of the medical doctor. In such a case, neither the hospital nor the doctor could be blamed, but the man who refused to take the drugs as prescribed.

One of the serious banes to the use of religion to fighting corruption is the leadership of religions. Such are leaders who have been absorbed in corruption as if salt dissolved in water, using religion to carry out their nefarious activities. One cannot exhaust cases of corruption in places of worship ranging from financial mismanagement and sexual corruption, to political corruption which often led to chaos in places of worship. A long list of this is cited by Ogunwale (2006: 327), in his article titled: *"Corruption as a Major Source of Conflict in the Church"*. Disturbed by the extent of corruption in the Church today, he quoted one Pastor G.S. Akiode to have lamented 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 forgiven

(sic) murder, fraud, embezzlement, victimisation and shameless misuse of power and positions.

Speaking in the same spirit, Pavarala & Malik (2010: 98) lament on the attitudes of some religious leaders with particular reference to India when they submitted:

Religious leaders and the priestly class no longer seem to have moral influence over citizens, especially young men and women, who express cynicism towards those who preach the importance of accountability while themselves remaining unaccountable. Those who manage prominent places of worship are certainly not perceived as walking the 'righteous path,' but are believed to follow the beaten track of corruption. This has resulted in a view that those who run temples may themselves be fundamentally corrupt.

Similarly, the report of April 22, 2003 by Global Excellence further indicted one Pastoral Assistant with Christ Embassy, Lawrence Agada who also claimed to be a staff of Sheraton Hotels and Towers, Ikeja, but was held over the fraud totalling N39 million. Agada later confessed that he used the larger amount of the money in helping the gospel in Christ Embassy (p. 30). This is the position of religious leaders from whom we expect the sanitation of the society. So, if people doubt the efficacy of religion in the crusade against corruption, references to such religious leaders who sold their hereafter for the terrestrial life would render one passive to claim that religion is capable of fighting corruption.

The essence of the above instances is that religion is being commercialised by those in charge of it. This explains why in spite of proliferation of healing and prayer centres, people refuse to develop spiritually. Men of God are being contacted not for spiritual purposes but for prosperity and material well-being. Places of worship are no longer established for God's sake but for material sake. One cannot but quote a Professor of Islamic Studies who expressed his feeling on commercialisation of religion when he says:

What we are trying to emphasise here is that spiritualism has been downplayed to materialism in the contemporary Nigeria to the extent that the general overseer of a particular church publicly declared that "true worship of the Lord is not complete if it has not touched our pockets." One wonders what the preacher was actually

### *The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria*

trying to preach to his people – does this mean that a committed worshipper who is not rich has not been worshipping God? Or is the main reason of worshipping God to become rich? Commercialization of religion is therefore a gross abuse of religion. The so called anointed ones are now sunk in materialism that it is difficult for them to move out of it. The case is no better than the sale of indulgences in the Papal age when the church was pursuing means of financing its burgeoning bureaucracy and other activities and therefore became worldly and material conscious to the extent that the work of God became secondary to it. The proliferation of places of worship; the littering of our roundabouts and every conspicuous place with posters, and signposts, as well as various religious advertisements on electronic and print media speak volumes on the extent of religiosity of Nigerians. However one doubts the spiritual seriousness of these ‘men of God’, as their calls are commercially motivated. Mr. Chairman sir, I feel I should ask what the religious leaders wanted to use three aeroplanes and several jeeps they accepted as gifts from Cecilia Ibru for?

Religious rivalry is another serious challenge that could hamper the use of religion to curb corruption in Nigeria. Experience has shown that adherents of religions are not tolerant enough to allow some religious injunctions to prevail for the benefit of mankind. As such, they agitate for what they feel could benefit them individually and raise unnecessary dust on what they feel is of no direct benefit to them. Or why should the Muslims in Nigeria demand for declaration of Fridays as work free days, when the Qur’an has clearly commanded them to disperse through the land seeking the bounty of Allah as soon as they conclude the *Jumu‘at* services (Q 62: 10). This request is nothing but a demonstration of rivalry and jealousy of the Christians who enjoy Saturdays and Sundays as work-free days to observe their religious duties. This same spirit could be said to be the reason why pilgrimage to Jerusalem has recently crept into Christianity as a principle, just to emulate the Muslims’ annual pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah, a core pillar of Islam.

The recent reactions and campaigns against non-interest banking model in Nigeria is a clear manifestation that religious bigotry is still in vogue in the



country. In view of the fact that some biblical verses (Deut 23: 19-20; Levit. 25: 36-37; Exodus 25: 25; Luke 6: 34-35 etc) prohibit the act of giving and collecting interest, it is amazing and surprising that some highly placed Christians started serious crusade against the move calling the CBN Boss all sort of names and singing unpleasant songs on media both print and electronic, as if the CBN has compelled all commercial banks to henceforth change their banking operation to interest free model. One is sure that if the rate at which non-Muslims reacted to the issue of interest-free banking in Nigeria is the way they have been reacting to corrupt practices, no one would be left in the practice again. Because of such reactions to the nation's membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), Nigeria could not tap the benefits of belonging to such a body for fear of being accused of one-sidedness and possible condemnation by non-Muslims. This same spirit is expressed by Oloyede (2010) when he writes:

.....if countries like Gabon, Cameroon, Benin, Sierra Leone and other African countries are members of the Organization without becoming Muslim or Islamic countries, one wonders the wild cacophony which surrounded the membership of Nigeria on this body. Indeed, the awareness on the part of the London and Paris Clubs of creditors that Nigeria as a member of the OIC could borrow money from the Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia without interest influenced their decision to cancel parts of the accumulated debt of Nigeria from their extortionate interest.

The point we are trying to raise is that religion will only be fighting corruption in theory if unhealthy rivalry continues to generate unnecessary tension amongst its adherents. It will therefore be very difficult to fight a common enemy where members of the same family disagree among themselves.

### **Modality for integrating religion into the anti-corruption crusade**

Fall in moral standard, religious and ethical values as well as low income and high poverty level have been advanced by some scholars as some of the reasons for corruption in Nigeria (Atoyebi & Mobolaji, 2004). It needs to be mentioned that the machinery of religion could be used effectively to fight corruption. With particular reference to Islam hermeneutics, both preventive

### *The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria*

and curative measures could be used to achieve this. Realising that corruption is not only and simply material, but spiritual, Islam lays down some rules which every believer is expected to abide by. Such virtues include belief in God, maintaining good relationships with one's parents, family and kin, giving full measure, and speaking justly (Qur'an 6: 151-152). It also frowns at such vices as infanticide and all other shameful deeds, including murder and embezzlement, all which are part and parcel of corrupt practices. As part of the curative measures to check corruption, Islam frowns at canvassing for position of authority for selfish end and describes a position of authority as trust that office holders shall be held to account on the Day of Resurrection. It enjoins that only those who are morally and spiritually qualified should be appointed into public offices. These qualifications, according to Oladosu (2012: 330), would guard them against temptation, as consciousness of God becomes the "armour against the most tempting of all temptation."

In addition to the above, Islam institutionalises stiff punishments to deter the perpetration of corruption in the following Qur'anic verse:

The only reward of those who make war upon Allah and His messenger and strive after corruption in the land will be that they will be killed or crucified or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off or will be expelled out of the land. Such will be the degradation in the world, and in the Hereafter theirs will be an awful doom (Qur'an 5: 32).

One of the lessons that can be learnt from the stiff punishments attached to acts of corruption as indicated above is that mild punishment for any act of corruption tempts its perpetrators to become addicted to them, as they know that upon serving such punishment, they continue to enjoy the proceeds of their corruption freely. This can also motivate others to join them in the act. However, stiff punishment would deter the commission of such crimes and as well render the criminal incapable of returning to committing such crimes in future.

If this should be the case, every avenue has to be explored to reinstate religion in the main stream of crusade against corruption. To ensure a successful incorporation of religion in the anti-corruption crusade therefore, we are of the opinion that religious bodies such as the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs should set up a committee with the following terms of references:

- a. to find out the causes of corruption from Islamic perspective;

- b. to explore the Qur'an, *hadith* and Islamic literatures for the purpose of extracting instances of corruption and the consequences of such in Islamic history;
- c. to identify the nature and causes of corrupt practices in a community;
- d. to identify the effects of corruption on nation's development;
- e. to explain instances of corrupt practices at every sphere of human life – politically, economically, educationally, socially and even religiously;
- f. to highlight preventive measures of corrupt practices in the country from Islamic perspective;
- g. to identify the roles to be played by members of the family, relatives and community of public office holders who represent them to safeguard and protect the integrity of their family and community by not bringing disrepute to them through corruption and abuse of office; and
- h. to identify other ways of using religion for the efficacy of redeeming the nation from the abyss of total degeneration that might have been caused by corruption.

Such a religious body should also be mandated to submit a full report of the committee to the authority in power for onward transmission to the existing anti-graft commissions in the nation for them to realise the relevance of religion in the fight against corruption. This development does not in any way make religious bodies to become agents of the government, but their contribution to checking the menace of corruption in the country. Their silence and indifference to this cankerworm may be taken to mean their satisfaction with it and may smell doom not for only those who perpetrate it, but to the virtuous ones who see the truth and refuse to say it. The basis of this strategy is the Qur'anic injunction that a group of people should be inaugurated for the purpose of inviting to all that is good, enjoining virtues and forbidding vices and corruption (Q. 3: 104).

Apart from the above, such religious bodies as the National Council of Muslim Youth Organizations (NACOMYO), the Nasrullahi'l-Fath Society of Nigeria (NASFAT), Quareeb and other *Asalatu*/prayer groups, which are being patronised by Muslim politicians and public office holders, could adjust their weekly programmes to include sermons on Islamic perspectives on corruption in addition to their programmes designed for spiritual development. The issue of spiritualism can hardly be addressed where corruption is prevailing. After all, Allah does not accept anything except what is obtained through pure and legitimate means and the acceptance of the prayer of a

### *The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria*

worshipper who dwells in corruption will undoubtedly not be accepted by God.

Another strategy to be used to incorporate religion in the fight against corruption is for the EFCC, ICPC and other related bodies to mount some religious programmes on radio, television and print media for the purpose of educating the populace on the menace of corruption in the society. Such religious programmes to be anchored and sponsored by the anti-graft agencies must be handled by religious scholars who are well-versed and who would not be eulogising politicians and money-bags, but will focus their preaching on the havoc of corruption and the stand of Islam on it.

In addition to the above, the EFCC, ICPC and other related bodies should work hand-in-hand with broadcasting stations to ensure that films and other captions which encourage corruption and teach corrupt practices are no longer played on their stations. It is disheartening to observe that most of the radio and television drama which are expected to be means of exploring, understanding, assessing and developing human values and needs have now turned to as a source of vices and other corrupt practices. No wonder then that John Northbrook in his article “*A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays and Interludes*” cited by Nasir (2008) prescribed a stiff punishment for those who partake in this profession. He was reported to have said: “artistes should be taken for rogues and punishment appointed for them is to be burnt through the ear with a hot iron of an inch compass.” He probably prescribed this punishment based on the role being played by them in downplaying morality to achieve their personal popularity, fame and financial gain. We are therefore of the opinion that films should be properly censored before being presented for public consumption. We are aware that there is a body saddled with this responsibility, however, their impacts are yet to be felt in view of the high rate of immoral and amorous teachings being demonstrated in many drama films presently in circulation in the country. Rather, programmes and plays which will assist in resisting the temptation of corrupt practices and as well help in inculcating Islamic values should be encouraged.

The school has a vital role to play in the socialization and acculturation of the society. Religious education, no doubt, is a vehicle to achieve this in our schools. It is however disheartening that Religious Studies is being gradually phased out of the school system in Nigeria. It is amazing to see that students who undertake science and commercial subjects are not given the opportunity to enrol for Religious Studies, as if they are not supposed to be religious by virtue of being science or commercial students, or as if religion and these

subjects are enemies which should not be combined. It is therefore not a surprise for products of this system using their knowledge with no reference to God and so turning what is supposed to be of value for mankind to destructive weapon. While stressing the evil inherent in man-made education system devoid of religion, Sarwar (1996:7) writes:

The man-made education system has led to many forms of social degeneration: misuse of human intellect and creativity to suit political and economic objectives; abuse of drugs, power, authority and wealth; increased murder and crime; and self-abasement through suicide and euthanasia. The race for the acquisition of nuclear and other weapons, the hoarding and wilful destruction of food (whilst millions starve across the world), discrimination based on race, colour, sex, and religion, and attempts to legitimise and even celebrate unnatural acts (sodomy, homosexuality, sadomasochism, etc) are further instances of our moral decline. Corruption and greed, poverty and lack of basic amenities, and limitations on freedom of expression, even in Muslim countries, make the situation look even bleaker. Wars, genocide, persecution and torture continue even today; whilst the most developed countries supply arms, tacitly supporting abuses of human rights, condemning or acquiescing in an appalling show of double-standards, dictated by political and economic considerations without reference to moral and ethical concerns.

It therefore becomes imperative to give religious education the utmost attention it deserves in the nation's education sector if the efforts of fighting corruption to the grassroots would yield fruitful results. This is because education without religion is more or less like torchlight in the hand of a thief in the night for him to pick the best items from his victims.

The need to stress the importance of declaration of assets by public office holders should be emphasised by religious leaders. This will assist in checking the imbalance between what is being earned as salaries and the assets acquired while in office. It is in Nigeria where the monthly take-home of workers could hardly take them home, yet many of them, through dubious and corrupt means, have multi-million worth cars and houses. The disparity between the masses and those in high offices needs to be bridged if actually the war

### ***The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria***

against corruption will be successful. In that wise, the agitation for minimum wage of N18,000 per month should not be politicised any longer, to avoid workers sourcing for survival through corrupt means. It is apposite here to quote Dopamu (2009: 49) on the insensitivity of those in high offices to the request of the masses, which should also be an item of preaching by religious leaders. He writes:

In Nigeria, people in high offices are insensitive to the needs of the suffering masses. Government keeps saying that the demands of the masses are “in the pipeline” until vandals are tempted to vandalize our pipelines to know exactly what government is keeping “in the pipelines”.... People are no longer stealing millions but billions of naira. It is reported that Law Makers in the House of Representatives each earns N114,000 daily as food allowance. Even if each of them can eat a cow a day, do they need such amount for food?

At this juncture, one needs to salute the courage of some political leaders who organise *Tafsir* class in the Government House during Ramadan for scholars to brief them on the teachings of Islam. However, the programme will be more meaningful only if those in authority are not selective of their favourites among the scholars who would only be eulogising them and their programmes, and if such a programme will not be cosmetic and meant for audience from the town while the organisers who are supposed to be the beneficiaries themselves are not on seat to listen to the word of God.

### **Conclusion**

To fight corruption is not only an existential necessity but also a divine imperative in view of the evil of this practice not only on human physical life but also on spiritual development. Religion therefore has a crucial role to play in the fight against this obnoxious practice. This paper has so far exposed the justification for using the medium of religion in fighting corruption and the manner in which this could be put into practice. The paper has also identified some stumbling blocks against using religion to fight corruption. However, it is our conclusion that the failure of some religious leaders to play the historical role they are expected to play in moulding public morality and ethics, should not be a licence to summarily discard religion as an instrument

of fighting corruption. After-all, no one will throw away the baby with the bathing water.

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