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## **The Role of Religion in Combating Corruption: The Nigerian Experience.**

by

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### **Abstract**

*Religion is a way of life. Most religious beliefs and doctrines are antithetical to corruption. A vast majority of Nigerians are religious faithful and belong to religions that do not condone corruption. Despite this fact, corruption, like air, is found everywhere in Nigeria. The work examined the role of religion in combating corruption in Nigeria. It adopted descriptive method in its analysis. The work is of the view that religion is a veritable tool for combating corruption depending on how religion is perceived by its faithful. It recommended that for religion to create significant impact on reducing corruption in Nigeria, religious faithful must live not only by percept but also by precept.*

**Key words:** Nigerians, religion, corruption, morality.

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### **1. Introduction**

The history of religion is as old as the history of man himself. Religion also exists in great variety. In Nigeria, religion is a sine qua non to more than ninety percent of its population. It has affected the lives of many in so many ways. While each religion has its own norms, values and acceptable standards, it is generally agreed that most of them condemn corruption. Evidence of this is found in their doctrines. Since more than ninety percent of the Nigerian population are either Muslims, Christians or Traditional religion affiliates and where these three religions, by doctrine, do not condone corruption, one would have thought that the degree of social morality would be very high thereby minimizing the prevalence of corruption. Very disappointedly, however, the reverse is the case.

Corruption is found everywhere in Nigeria. This social cancer has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. Corruption is high among politicians, bureaucrats, academics, judiciary, police, army, customs and even religious organisations are not spared

by this social malady. Corruption is manifested in different dimensions in both private and public lives of Nigerians. It ranges from electoral malpractices, poor service delivery, contract inflation, bribery, money laundering, ghost workers' syndrome, to immoral behaviour such as raping, stealing, and out-right looting of the public treasury. Corruption in Nigeria has become systemic and endemic. The most worrisome of all is that most of those perpetrating corruption are religious affiliates whose religion's doctrines abhor corruption. Granted, corruption is a global malaise which has not spared any country of the world. However, its alarming pervasiveness in Nigeria in general and its public service in particular have affected the country's quest for accelerated socio-economic and political development, thus becoming a matter of serious concern. This happened in spite of the view that a vast majority of Nigerians are ardent religious adherents. This of course brings to question the role of religion in combating corruption in Nigeria.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

Religion is expression of man's belief in and reverence for a superhuman power recognized as the creator and governor of the universe (Watch Tower, 1990). It involves devotion to some principle, strict fidelity or faithfulness, conscientiousness; pious affection or attachment (The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). Adenugba and Omolawal (2014) conceived religion as faith in a divinely created order of the world, agreement with which is the means of salvation for a community and thus for each individual who has a role in that community. In this sense, the authors claimed, the term applies principally to such systems as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which involve faith in a creed, obedience to a moral code set down in sacred Scriptures, and participation in common practices. Strictly speaking the term religion refers to the way of life (Richardson, 1966). In Nigeria more than ninety per cent of the population are either Christians or Muslims while the remaining ones believe in various traditional religions or are atheists.

Corruption, according to Umoh (1983) has no standard definition. This work, therefore, does not intend to proffer any. The need to have a precise point of departure and a properly delimited conceptual framework to contain the discussion, however, constrains this academic piece to gathering working conceptual or ideational model to ease the discussion. The World Bank (1997) defined corruption as "the abuse of public power for private benefit". Transparency International (TI) defined it as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain". Khan (1996) viewed corruption as the "behaviour that deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the action of someone in position of public authority because of private motives such as wealth, power or status". The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) Act, 2000, defined corrupt acts to include "bribery, fraud and other related offences". The Vision 2010 Committee defined corruption as "all those improper actions or transactions aimed at changing the normal course of events, judgments and position of trust". In Nigeria, as Arnold (1977) opined, corruption is most usually taken to mean "the receiving or offering of money or other clear advantages in return for contracts, not being obliged to discharge an obligation,

obtaining a job for which one is not qualified, sidestepping justice, leaping ahead of a queue, and so on.” Deducing from that definition, it could be said that corruption is anything done in an abnormal manner with intention of taking undue advantages of certain situations.

The work relies on Rigg’s theory of prismatic society. Formalism is one of the characteristics of such society. Formalism essentially means the amount of discrepancy or incongruence between the norms and practices. The prevalence of formalism is a distinguishing mark of the prismatic system. In other words, the laws on the statute book is one thing, the actual behavior of the official is another. Not that the law is irrelevant to behavior. Indeed, the official may insist on literal performance of the law or he may disregard it utterly. What permits formalism is the lack of pressure toward programmes objectives, the weakness of social power as a guide to bureaucratic performance, and hence great permissiveness for arbitrary administration. Whether an official chooses to enforce a law to the letter or permit its total violation depends, presumably, upon his inclinations and his advantage.

It is easy to see that administrative direction based on formalism opens the door to corruption. The client may have to pay the official to carry out the law-as in the issuance of permits, licenses, quota allocations or to overlook violations – as in the payment of taxes. In a society like Nigeria with high level of formalism it is very common to note discrepancies between what the laws say and what is practiced. Such attitude is seen in all aspects of lives among Nigerians whose majority are very religious which is evident in more than ninety percent belonging to Christianity Islam or African Traditional religion. There is incongruence between what they preach and what they do. This explains why religion is unable to reduce or curb corruption in Nigeria.

### **3. Objectives of Study**

According to Henslin (2007), one of the functions of religion is to provide guidelines for everyday life through rules and regulations on what to do and what to abstain from. In other words, the teachings of a religion were to influence the personality and the daily conducts of each believer. The objective of this work, therefore, was to assess the impact of religion in curbing corruption in Nigeria.

### **4. The Types and Origin of Corruption in Nigeria**

Aluko (2008) had identified different types of corruption to include but not limited to disobedience to laws and to constituted authority, electoral corruption, moral corruption, and financial corruption. He, however, maintained that though corruption of any form is detrimental to national development, today, the worldwide emphasis on corruption is centered on financial corruption and its ascribed debilitating effects on economic development of the poor nations of the world. He averred that the essence of financial corruption is bribery, illegal and greedy acquisition of public funds into private pockets, which otherwise would have been invested for the public good.

In Nigeria, corruption is ubiquitous. For this reason, people often wonder how corruption made its way to all aspects of public and private lives. It is found in

government circles among the legislators and the executives. Even the judiciary and the bureaucracy are plagued with corruption to the extent that many people have lost confidence in them. According to Otite (1986), although the ubiquity of corruption is acknowledged, its magnitude and character are defined by different social and cultural contexts and time dimensions. Everybody believes he knows what corruption is and what it is all about. This false claim makes those who themselves are involved in corrupt practices to boldly and openly condemn others who involve some other forms of corruption. Accordingly, Umoh (1981) remarked, “part of this confusion arises from the fact that opinions differ about the concept of corruption just as the attitudes of people also do towards the practice of corruption itself. What some people regard as corrupt practices are considered acceptable and fair dealings by others.”

Many authors who traced the origin of corruption in Nigeria’s public life unanimously agree that this social cancer was planted in the Nigerian public life by the colonial administration. For example, Lacville (1991) declared, “African countries have received the benefits of French and British education systems along with their disadvantages.” He cited over-invoicing as one corrupt practices introduced into West Africa by Lebanese descendants. Lacville (1991) added that it is no exaggeration that most government purchases today in the region are subject to over-invoicing. The real big kickbacks, as observed Lacville (1991), are in the building and public works and military supply sectors which are dominated by firms from France, Britain, Italy, Germany and elsewhere. Both kickbacks and over-invoicing are foreign imports. They were imported just as other forms of corrupt practices to Africa by foreigners who colonized Africa. Thus, Nigeria as any other African country also got its own ration of corruption. Incidentally most of these foreigners were religions’ affiliates.

It was because of corruption by foreigners who colonized Africa that prompted Nkrumah (1972) to declare and urge that “bribery and corruption which had been part and parcel of the colonial set-up must be stamped out”. Not only did the colonisers instill corruption into the public life, they also taught traditional rulers how to perpetrate corruption for their advantages. For instance, colonial administration used chiefs as tools to exploit peasants and involved in other corrupt practices which were not known to the people before the arrival of colonialism.

As Chinweizu (1978) observed,

*Chiefs were granted a percentage commission on the taxes they collected. They were also allowed to keep for themselves part of the money given to pay the labourers they supplied. They were privileged social class, exploiting the peasantry for colonial masters.... Now with French propping them up, and supplying the effective basis for their position, they greatly and systematically abused their ancient duties and privileges. Becoming brazen exploiters of their positions, they imposed extra dues on populations ... they invented new obligations and imposed them upon the populace. They levied money to pay for new houses, cars and pilgrimages to Mecca; they overtaxed*

*population and kept excess taxes; they invented new tax items for their private benefits.*

These corrupt practices of taking what is not theirs, unfair rewards and exploitation persist long after the end of colonialism.

Early merchants played vital roles in introducing corruption into Nigeria. They did this to gain some advantage in customership and monopoly of trade over their fellow European competitors. They bribed the chiefs with money, gifts, foreign and funny names and titles. They flattered the chiefs with frequent visits and patronized the king's regular banquet. Also in their commercial dealings with the people, too, instances of fraudulent practices and tricks were not uncommon, occasioning, thereby, conflicts that frequently erupted between the indigenous and the European traders (Umoh, 1981).

Others traced the origin of corruption in Nigeria to the foreign immigrants from Sierra Leone and West Indies who came in the 1850's to the territory now known as Nigeria. Orizu (1970) explained that

*When they came they were able to understand the English language, which Nigerian did not understand. When the British government came in, its officials made them interpreters. They had access to the kings, and thus were something of a go-between for Europeans and the African potentates. They took advantage of the situation by initiating a system of bribery never known in Nigerian political history.*

Apart from introducing corruption into Nigeria directly, the colonial administration also created and stimulated corruption indirectly through its influence. Most people employed in the civil and public services were not faithful to the government because the impression was created that the government was not that of the people. As a result, according to Wraith and Simpkins (1963) was a habit of Africans irresponsibility towards those in power, carried over into the days when power came to African themselves. Government was seen as legitimate ground for plunder. They saw the government as a friend up to a point and as an enemy commanding respect and esteem at the deepest level. The government never won loyalty or affection of the people. Africans were indifferent to the government. This was compounded by an utmost total absence of senior African civil servants trained in honest and responsible attitudes to public business. This was due to the fact that those who could have trained them were corrupt and misguided foreigners.

The desire for big money comes from the West. It is satisfied in the West with tax payers' money. Hence, Lacville (1991) expressed the view that when the West left Africa at the latter's attainment of independence; the nationalists who took over power from them also took the desire for big money and corruption as a means for achieving it.

David-West (1976), however, differed with others on the origin of corruption in Nigerian public life. He traced the origin of corruption to human psychology. In his view, certain psychological attitudes bearing on self-respect, belief in personal worth, confidence in self, and personal pride predispose persons to corruption. Those who take to corruption, according to David-West (1976), are persons who have neither self-respect nor confidence in themselves. In addition, they also lack a sense of personal worth. These

people, in other words, have no personal pride. They may be wealthy without having the blessing of an inner feeling of personal worth. Since affluence and pride are not co-terminus, “one comes across numerous cases where a man though rolling on his affluence nevertheless suffers from inferiority complex before a materially less fortunate neighbor.” In the same way, one could be poor but nevertheless be endowed with a supreme feeling of personal worth. This explains why “there are a number of lowly fellows in the community who are not corruptible in spite of their material poverty “while at the same time many of the well-to-do remain pathologically corrupt. From the foregoing, it is not incorrect to induce that despite the fact that origin of corruption in Nigeria is not traced to religion, it is generally agreed that religion as a way of life, and based on its stance against corruption should be able to mould its affiliates.

### **5. Factors that Promote Corruption**

There are also factors that promote corruption in Nigeria. Ambition is one of them. Accepting this fact Akin-George (1989) explained,

*Nigerian worker must strive to build his own house, find his means of transport, look after his health and that of his family, trains his children, and so forth. In discharging these functions, he hardly receives assistance from the government or employer. Yet his income level is very low to his day to day requirements. The thought of the future ordinarily drives him to engage in corrupts and other fraudulent practices if and when opportunity occurs.*

The social habit of several wives and children is another factor that promotes corruption. Akin-George (1991) asserted that the demand for a large family and the pressures from extended family drive the weak-hearted to commit corruption. He opined that since our culture imposes on us the responsibility for extended family in addition to our immediate families some people tend to find unorthodox means of discharging such responsibilities.

The culture introduced to the African by the white recognizes only the rich no matter how the wealth was acquired. The society also ignores the means to the end even if the rich occupies a position of public trust. It is this kind of person that is singled out for honour, praise and recognition. He is hailed when he donates big money at social gatherings or when he lavishes ill-gotten money at the religious functions, and at the public place, whereas in African tradition such people were outcasts. In his observation, Umoh (1981) opined,

*ethic and morality are for the dogs. Those who amass wealth by thievery, cheating, trickery, robbery, burglary, bribery, embezzlement and all sorts of traditionally unapproved or corrupt means are accorded the greatest respect in the society. They are among the first to be chosen as leaders and representatives of the people. They are among the chairmen and occupants of the high tables at our social and religious functions.*

Concurring, as it were, with Umoh, Akin-George (1989) added that it is not uncommon to see corrupt individuals being selected for a string of chieftaincy titles. Important streets, schools, hospitals and public institutions are named after them. On the other hand, the innocent but poor workers is derided and shunned.

Society's attitude of accepting and approving wealth acquired illegitimately encourages corruption. It makes corruption to spread like wild fire and permeates the ranks and files of the society. The attitudes of looking at those that do not involve in fraudulent and corrupt practices as fools and pretenders and subsequently scorning and shunning them even in public occasions and in government appointments is a stimulant to corruption. Corruption is encouraged whenever an ex-convict or a person who had been caught involving in one kind of corrupt practice or the other is appointed to public office or is allowed to contest for election in the country. These attitudes encourage the corrupt leader to continue to acquire and accumulate ill-gotten wealth at the expense of the masses. According to Umoh (1981), this attitude is contrary to the indigenous culture of Africa which disapproves wealth acquired illegitimately or by corrupt means. The individual who acquired wealth by such unapproved means was also scorned in his community. Incidentally, all the above factors that have induced corruption in Nigeria are condemned by most religions.

The implications of corruption are ignored by the Nigerian society, and corrupt practices are also looked upon kindly. These circumstances help to increase the rate of corruption in the country. Those that have tried to live as moral men in a corrupt society have generally given way sooner or later under agonizing pressures. What further compounded the situation is that so little seems to be derived or gained from trying to live moral life.

## **6. Density and Impact of Corruption**

Corruption has penetrated every level of Nigerian society. It is seen in government, science, sports, religion, and business. As observed Ehusani (2004) many Nigerians often fraudulently procure medical certificates of fitness from hospitals when they have not undergone any medical tests. They also obtain sick leave permits from doctors, when they are hale and hearty. According to the same source, they sometimes falsify the age of their children and obtain fake birth certificates in order to get them into nursery or primary schools earlier than the law stipulates. They also swear to false affidavits in order to obtain citizenship certificates, and make false age declarations when seeking employment or admission into institutions of learning. Many of those who today hold drivers' licences have never seen what a V.I.O. testing ground looks like. They simply pay for the license and declare themselves drivers, putting at risk not only their lives, but also the lives of other road users. Many years ago Daily Express (1971) reported "Nigeria is at present bombarded with many social evils, like bribery, corruption, fraudulence, public scandal...double standard of living by top men, aiding and abetting professional smugglers...and nepotism." In similar vein, in writing on prevalence of corruption Akinyele (1971) also observed



The student seeking a job must first answer to the injustice of corruption. The travelling student meets social evil, corruption, at the Passport Office. Corruption bids him farewell at the airport: as if the social evil would say, “go, but please come back quick.” In fact, when he returns, corruption greets him “welcome,” at the port of arrival.

Reed (1973) equally opined, “Everyone has to pay dash to get anything done, whether it is going through customs at the airport, getting a room in one of Lagos’...hotels or having an official paper stamped in a government office.” More than forty years when those observations were made Nigeria is still whopping in corruption

The cost of corruption in Nigeria is high. Both high-level and small-scale corruption increased the cost of living, diminished the quality of products, and resulted in fewer jobs and lower wages (Watchtower, 1995). Again as Ehusani (2004) claimed, corruption has bred inefficiency and diminished productivity in both the public and private sectors of the economy. The same source concluded that corruption has discouraged investment, fuelled capital flight, increased unemployment and inflation, created an acute degree of poverty, brought about a severe decline in the quality of life and life expectancy in Nigeria, and given Nigeria and Nigerians a terribly bad image in the eyes of the international community. Corruption is an affront on human dignity and an assault on the human conscience. Corruption has undermined good governance, harmed economic efficiency and development, distorted trade, and penalized citizens in the country. In fact, corruption in the country has aborted the nation’s potency and productive capacity. As Watchtower, (1995) opined, the worst part of the entire corruption episode is that unlike ordinary criminals, corrupt executives and politicians rarely go to jail or make restitution for their ill-gotten gain. Because of the secret nature of bribes, kickbacks, and payoffs, it is often difficult to expose high-level corruption.

## **7. Religion and Corruption: An overview**

In Nigeria, there are many religions; however, more than ninety per cent of Nigerian population belong to three of them. These are African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. Incidentally all the three religions condemn corruption. As earlier mentioned, more than ninety percent of the Nigerian population belong to one of these three religions. In the indigenous culture of Africa and traditional religions, wealth acquired illegitimately or by corrupt means was never appreciated by the society. The individual who acquired wealth by such unapproved means was also scorned in his community. He was neither given any position of trust or authority in that society nor could he join the company or association of honest and respectable people. In Nigeria of today, it is the end that justifies the means (Umoh, 1981).

Another religion, Christianity does not condone corruption. Christians rely on the Bible as their guide and constitution. Bible admonishes Christians to abhor corruption. For examples Deuteronomy 10:17, Proverbs 17: 23 and Exodus 23: 8 warn Christians against being partial and taking bribe. Similarly, 1Corinthians 5:9-11 urges Christians to quit mixing in company with fornicator, greedy person, extortioner, an

idolater, reviler or drunkard all of which are corrupt practices. In Isaiah 33:15 God describes the one who will find his favour to be “the one who walks in continual righteousness, who speaks what is upright, who rejects dishonest, fraudulent gain, whose hands refuse a bribe rather than grabbing it, who closes his ear to talk of bloodshed, and who shuts his eyes to avoid seeing what is bad.” At Ephesians 4:28 the Bible admonishes the thief to steal no more. Again in Roman 13:1-7 and 1Peter 2: 13-15 Christians are commanded to be in subjection to superior authority and to pay tax, fear and honor superior authority. All these commandments are summed up in the two greatest commandments the love of God and the love of neighbour. Love of God and love of neighbour would not allow any Christian to involve any form of corruption (Matthew 22:37). In other words, all forms of corruption are forbidden in the Bible as could be seen in the cited scriptures.

Similarly, Islamic position on corruption is quite clear. For examples Azeez (2014) opined that Islam looks at corruption from moral and ethical angle and strongly offers a universally comprehensible blueprint for human behavior which revolves social justice, equitable distribution of wealth, provision of necessities and the protection of the weak against economic exploitation by the strong. According to Azeez (2014), this explain why the prophet said “whoever from you is appointed by us to a position of authority and he conceals from us a needle or something smaller than that, it will be misappropriation of public funds and he will have to produce it on the day of judgement”.

Other provisions in the Islamic religion that forbid Muslims from engaging in corruption as cited by Shehu (2012) included those found in the Holy Qur’an in Chapter 11 Verse 85 which says “o my people give full measure and Full weight with equity and defraud not people of their things and commit not inequity in the earth causing disorder”. Also Prophet (PBUH) enjoins Muslims to desist from illegal enrichment of themselves as shown in the Hadith: “the flesh that grows out of unlawful income has no place in the hereafter but hell”. Similarly, Prophet (PBUH) remarked that: “What rights have you to put aside something that does not belong to you. If you were to remain in your father’s house would you get what you are taking?” From the foregoing, it could be concluded that Islam has zero tolerance for corruption and that Islam is diametrical to corruption.

## **8. Religion and Corruption in Nigeria**

Since most Nigerians are either Christians or Muslims or affiliates of Traditional religions all of which forbid corruption and with all the show of religiosity or outward display of piety as Ehusani (2004) observed one would have expected to see a very high degree of social morality in Nigeria, since the religions they belong do not condone corruption. In Nigeria, however, the reverse is the case. There is an embarrassing contradiction between the high ethical demands of the three religions which majority of Nigerians profess, and the phenomenon of corruption that has made the country one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

It is incredible to observe that when the behaviour and attitude of religious faithful are ranged against the position of their religions on corruption they are found

wanting. Most government officials accused and convicted for corruption ranging from bribery, misappropriation of public fund to embezzlement are all religious adherents. This included former inspector general of police, former governors, former ministers, bank officials, civil servants and businessmen (Tom, 2013). Many religious leaders extort money from their ignorant followers, violate traffic rules, involve in examination malpractice, sleep with people wives and keep concubines; they make showy display of their ill-gotten wealth, lie against the Lord when they say "the Lord says" when the Lord did not say, engage in fraud of all types both in their places of worship and elsewhere and cheat those who work for them. When they do these things they know they are actually involving in one form of corruption or the other. While as a result of their corrupt practices they are counting their real estates in many part of the country, fly in private jets, roll around in expensive flashy cars, build private universities with followers' money and turn around to charge their children exorbitantly and parade themselves as very important persons (VIP) in public occasions, it is disheartening and appalling to see their followers wallowing in abject poverty because of their corrupt practices (Tom, 2013). Religious leaders' adherents these days are worse than those of Jesus' days whom he described as corrupt, hypocrites and greedy. They violate government rules with impunity and throw morally to the dogs.

Some religious affiliates in Nigeria are very corrupt and have made Nigeria sick socially, economically and politically. For example, while a vast majority of legislators in Nigeria are religious affiliates, it is not uncommon for legislators to be involved in budget padding and requiring presidential or governor's handshake before passing an appropriation bill into law (The Nation 2016). Similarly, there are reports of school principals who not only initiate but also fully engage in examination misconduct, just as bank executives who are stunt members of religious groups have defrauded the banks and rendered them distressed or tapped from accounts of customers that are dormant. Government officials give contracts to individuals at inflated rate and get funds for parties in returns; individuals and companies give funds to parties and get contracts from the government that control such parties in returns (Graf, 1988); and in many offices, government clerks collect money before attending to their clients. The party men thumb printed a booklet of 50 ballots and fought at the polling station, just as electoral officials collected money to change election results (The Nation 2016). Thugs shot and maimed people and make away with ballot boxes, the same way census officials alter census figures in exchange for money. All of them profess one religion or the other.

In similar vein there are reports and cases of the police officers who collected money at check points and shot those that have refused to pay and a police officer who rapped at gun point while some abetted crime (Oluchikere, 2005; Global Concord 2016) other known corrupt practice include an elder of a church who slept with his follower's wife and got stuck in (Global Concord, 2016) and a pastor who slept with both the mother and daughter and is standing trial (Vanguard, 2016). In the same vein, there are many cases of Alhajis who defrauded banks and embezzled public funds, herdsmen who destroyed other peoples' farms, maimed helpless children, rapped married women, and kill their husbands (The Punch 2016); militants who blow pipelines and bring economic

hardship (The Nation 2016). Sadly, those who engaged in all these forms of corruption incidentally are religious affiliates.

It is also true that terrorists who detonated bombs and killed innocent souls are all religious affiliates and are aware that their actions are against their beliefs. There are also many cases of lecturers who harassed students sexually and engaged on corrupt and unwholesome academic activities, or students who are eager and willing to do everything illegal to pass examinations (Udofia, 2010). Majority of them belong to various religious bodies. In Nigeria there are cases of judges who collected bribe and perverted justice, or members of anti-corruption institutions who collected bribe and become accomplices to those that they were to fight (Vanguard, 6, 2006). Other forms of corruption that are rampant and are practiced by the religious affiliates in Nigeria include cheating, raping, assassination, kidnapping, robbery, thievery and armed robbery (The Nation 2016). They have all failed to live by what they claim they devote their lives to. That is the reason Nigeria is engulfed by corruption. Upon all these, there is hardly any instance where religions are seen or heard sanctioning or calling to order their erring members that have engaged in numerous acts of corruption. More often, religions are seen and used as shield by corrupt religious affiliates to cover their corrupt acts.

For this reason, Adenugba and Omolawal (2014) opined:

*Religion is unfortunately providing a negative support for government as most government officials use it to abuse the collective conscience of the people through their deceits and manipulation. From all indications, it could be seen that long before the global economic meltdown currently being experienced, Nigeria has been experiencing religious meltdown and not only has it failed to curb corruption, but it has in itself become a channel of corruption.*

They scholars concluded that:

*almost all past leaders have one religious title or the other indicating that they believe in the supremacy of God, a fact which they could bear to bring to their administration...It does not seem to be a matter of contradiction for many highly placed Nigerians that they embezzle or misappropriate millions of naira while at the same time struggling to occupy front seats in the church or even take titles in the church. Many of these leaders during the oath taking ceremonies swear to the Bible to provide faithful and honest governance and protect the integrity of the nation and such declaration ends at the point of the ceremony as actions immediately thereafter reek of corruption and dishonesty.*

Though the scholars wrote specifically about Christians, their observations on religion and corruption are also applicable to other religious groups, namely, Islam and African Traditional Religion. Religion has failed in its responsibility to mould the character of the adherents. This accounted for the observation made by Wraith and Simpkins (1963) that the arrival of foreign religion in Africa saw an increase in corruption in the country. They claimed that these foreign religions, namely, Christianity

and Islam, condemned most of the African culture that helped to keep corruption at bay. Although these foreign religions are established firmly and are found everywhere in Nigeria, Wraith and Simpkins (1963) declared, “Christian morals are not yet backed by sanction as powerful as those of tribal moral. Some of the most powerful churches do not regard corruption and bribery as being a matter of first importance; because some are themselves corrupt.” Islam is equally found wanting as far as keeping corruption at bay is concerned. Hence, Wraith and Simpkins (1963) said that the religion of Islam, a more powerful influence than Christianity in many regions and growing everywhere, for all its stern personal disciplines of prayer and fasting, and for all its greater integration of so many aspects of life with the faith, appears to be tolerant of bribery and corruption in secular affairs, and to be more concerned with private than with public morality. With such observations and comments religion seems to lose its camouflage. It betrayed its moral inanity and ethical paucity.

## 9. Conclusion and Recommendations

As proposed at the beginning of this work, religion can be a veritable instrument for combating corruption if the religious affiliates are not only the hearers of the word but also the doers of the word. They should not continue to lead a double life or remain hypocrite. They should allow their religions to mold them and transform them. Nigerians who belong to different religions must allow their faith to be accompanied by work. They must allow what they learn from their religious doctrines to transform them as it did to biblical Matthew, Paul and Zacheaus. That will make them to refund the looted public funds and resist corruption. The fight against corruption in Nigeria is a moral one that cannot be won by legislation alone or by the sword of legal penalties which is why religion has a central role to play. The same view is held by Osinbajo (2017) who said for corruption to be completely eradicated in the country, the fight against the menace must start from churches. He opined;

*...when church leaders resolved to ostracise and expose corrupt members of their congregation that the problem could be solved. Every time that we come to church, we are told about giving. But we need to talk more about honesty. We need to talk far more about honesty. In the same way we talk about giving, we need to talk more about honesty... church leaders must be ready to confront their members who are living above their means...when the church took its rightful place and decided to expose treasury looters, the nation's problems would be solved...if the church says you are not allowed to steal and we will ostracise you in our midst if you did if what a man has does not measure up to what he earns; if we found that a man has more money than he should have, if a man is earning a salary of a civil servant or a public servant and he has houses everywhere, we have to hold him to account.*

Religions must be quick in sanctioning those that do not adhere to their faith and doctrines. Appropriate treatment has to be meted out, in accord with religious laws to

those who are guilty and convicted of corruption. For example, Bible urges Christians to remove the wicked one [the corrupt one] from among the congregation. In traditional setting, such ones should be ostracized.

The religious leaders and affiliates have to recognize and regard corruption as an important and serious matter. This calls for more than rhetorical verbalization by religious leaders and their followers. As Russell (1967) once rightly remarked,

*When the authorities also are stupid ... they will tend to side with the stupid children, and acquiesce, at least tacitly in rough treatment for those who show intelligence. In that case, a society will be produced in which all the important position will be won by those whose stupidity enables them to please the herd. Such a society will have corrupt politicians, ignorant schoolmasters, policemen who cannot catch criminals and judges who condemn innocent men. Such a society even if it inhabits a country full of natural wealth, will in the end grow poor from inability to choose able men for important posts.*

What Russell referred here to as stupid leadership is also very much true of a corrupt religious leaders and is of much relevance to the Nigerian experience.

As Aluko cited in Arnold (1975) once said, "The day that the leadership of (different religions) of this country destroys the canker-worm within itself, the rank and file of the society will be frightened to indulge in questionable and sharp practices. Therefore, if we want to reform society, we must first reform the caliber of the aristocracy."

It is more than certain now that corruption will not be eradicated by decrees or purges alone. It is only likely to be eradicated when enough people want it be eradicated; when the climate, both moral and ethical, leads a sufficient number of people to want to oppose corruption in all its forms and at all levels. If it is to be combated successfully this requires personality transformation by the religious leaders in line with their doctrinal disposition towards corruption and their sincere efforts to engage in the process of education which will persuade the religious adherents to condemn it and demonstrate by their own lives that they will not tolerate it. When people cease to justify corruption as normal and therefore as acceptable there will be a chance of eradicating it, but not before then.

Religion has a double battle to fight, as Orizu (1970) said to educate the uneducated and, more important and more difficult, to reeducate the miseducated among their files and ranks to abhor corruption. To the same end, too, the truly religious adherents have a responsibility. Religions should note that the masses of society which incidentally are their members ought to be taught not to offer or cover up bribes, nor give in to the demand for same or engage in any other form of corrupt practices. It is a known fact that the religious affiliates' attitude and norms aid in the concealment of corrupt acts.

Existing anti-corruption laws and instruments ought to be carefully scrutinized and synchronized with the religious laws and doctrines to eliminate and close up possible loopholes through which corruption can leak into the society. New and adequate anti-corruption laws that can cope with the present level of technology applied in the practice

of corruption ought to be enacted and faithfully enforced. Above all, it is the responsibility of the different religious groups to assist their members to make their different religious doctrines their way of life

In all, this study observed that religious adherents paid only lip services to their religious doctrines which forbid corruption. This is evident in high prevalence of all forms of corruption in Nigeria ranging from embezzlement of public funds to immoral behaviour both in public and private lives of Nigerians. In conclusion, in Nigeria, religion has failed in its responsibility to mold the characters of its adherents toward corruption. Those who profess one religion or the other have failed to allow their faith to be accompanied by work. They cannot serve God without serving mankind. The true people of God are, therefore, those who habitually help, pity, and in their public and private life categorically reflect a wish that their “maxims should become a universal law” (Kant, 1949). That is to say, they do on to others at all time as they, in all honesty to themselves, want to be done onto by others. Each should acknowledge, as Cohen (1965), that:

*I cannot love God without devoting my whole heart as living for the sake of my fellow-men, without devoting my entire soul as responsive to all the spiritual trends in the world around me, without devoting all my force to this God in His correlation with man knowing that if I am able to do so, I shall be able to love God.*

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