

## **RELIGIOUS CORRUPTION: A DILEMMA OF THE NIGERIAN STATE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Among the major institutional problems that have impeded sustainable development in Nigeria is corruption, which is embedded on poor national orientation and culture. Thus, this work attempts to examine some of the vices associated with corrupt evangelism and indoctrination in Nigeria, and their implications for national development. It was discovered that the trajectories of religious expansion vis-à-vis corruption in the country are complementary. This paper argues that the overbearing influence of religion on national values is responsible for the widespread corruption in Nigeria. The most recent antidotes at combating this menace were examined. This is done by analyzing data collected from the field study.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Religion, Fundamentalism, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a product of greed, an act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private motives such as wealth, power or status (Ackerman, 1999:2; Khan, 1996:2-3). It entails a pervasive failure to tap self interest for productive purposes. Hence, corruption whether in the public or private sector, symbolizes an abuse of institutional trust for private gain. Nigeria has a total land area of about 923,768 sq. km and its coastline on the Gulf of Guinea stretches to about 774km. Its international land borders are shared with Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Ikelegbe, 2009). The country has 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory (figure 1). It is an obvious fact that corruption is a major problem confronting sustainable development in Nigeria. Some public office holders embezzles public fund with impunity. In the private sector, insider-trading and gross abuse of office is the order of the day. The recent crisis in the Nigerian banking sector is a testimony to this fact. The Nigerian state is presently experiencing a pandemic of corrupt practices in both public and private sectors. Many cases of corruption by political office holders have been reported without effective prosecution. This is a reflection of corruption emanating from the Judiciary. Corruption has become the culture of many Nigerians from the lower to the upper strata of the society. The Transparency International - 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption in 183 countries and territories around the world. According to this survey, Nigeria ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

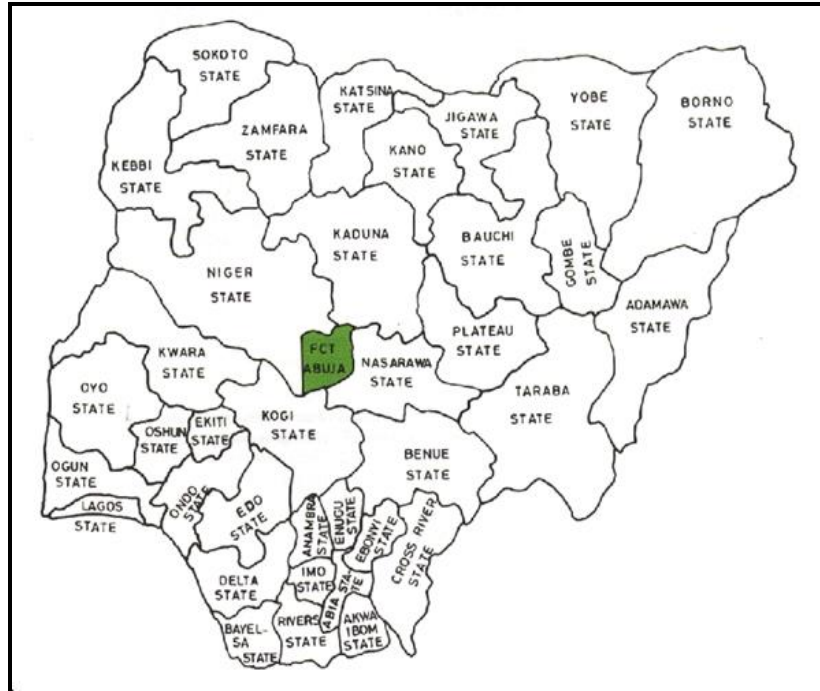
Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR) are the three major religions in Nigeria. These religions are not homogenous since they have several sects and cells characterized by unique modes of worship and practices. Hence, within Christianity can be found Catholics, Protestants and Pentecostals while among Muslims can be found *Sunni*, *Shi'ite*, *Wahhabis*, and *the Suffis* (Abdul-Rahman, 2004:92-126). According to Islamic tradition, it is interesting to note that Prophet Muhammad predicted the division of his followers into 73 sects. A *Hadith* - Mishkat I: 169-170 posits:

Abdullah b-Amr reported that the Messenger of Allah said: There will certainly come over my people what came to the children of Israil as closely as one sandal resembles another, so that if there was any of them who committed fornication with his mother openly, there will appear someone among my people who will commit that. The Israilites were divided into 72 sects and my people will be divided into 73 sects. Each of them will remain in the fire except one sect. They enquired: O Messenger of Allah! which is that? He said, That one on which I and my companions stand.

However the number of Islamic sects has far exceeded Muhammad's prediction (for the sects of Islam are now over 150). Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR) have not escaped the romance of corruption, probably due to its permeable nature. Church leaders now rub their congregations by manipulating the gospel for their personal gains. The Nigerian churches have drifted from the evangelism of salvation to that of prosperity, even if it entails robbing. There is media hype on Pastors collecting laundered funds as tithe and offering without recourse to the source. The Islamic religion is not left out as many Islamic leaders are now manipulating the Qur'an by encouraging ethnic and religious conflicts. This phenomenon has transformed into terrorism marked by the emergence of deadly terrorist groups such as *Boko-Haram*. In Nigeria, the adherents of ATR worships different types of gods such as, *Ogun* (God of Iron), *Orunmila* (God of Divination),

*Sango or Amadioha* (God of Thunder) and *Esu* (Jemiriye, 1998: 35; Johnson, 1921:150-151). Despite the potency of ATR, it is not in any way immune to corruption, as Diviners of ATR now manipulate oracular divinations in some circumstances to suit their personal cravings.

Despite the Nigerian oil wealth, the majority of her citizens continues to languish in abject poverty. Studies have shown that achieving consensus on sustainability values and actions is often difficult and painful, different stakeholders' interests are forced to the surface, compared and contrasted, criticized and debated (Kates et al 2005:20). Thus, some individual stakeholders find the process threatening to their selfish agenda thereby rejecting the process entirely to pursue their own white elephant project. Thus, undermining sustainable development in policy formulation. Development is sustainable if it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Brundtland Report: World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987:37). According to Soubbotina (2004: 9-10), in order for development to continue indefinitely, it should balance the interests of different groups of people from generation to generation, and do so simultaneously in three major interrelated areas – economic, social, and environmental. Institutional corruption is a major problem impeding sustainable development in Nigeria (Keeper, 2012:172). The Nigerian state has been sustained over time by institutionalizing systems of exploitation, injustice, and class privilege. According to Bossel (1999: 4-16), such societies would be socially unsustainable in the long run due to the factor of social injustice. For instance, corruption is responsible for the environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity in the Nigerian Delta region (Ehwarieme and Cocodia, 2011: 34-40; Afiotan and Ojatorotu, 2009: 193-196). Examining the impact of corruption on environmental management, Mendes (2006:31) argues that the cooperation between the elite and corrupt domestic or foreign corporations undermines inspection policies and leads to rigged regimes making a mockery of sustainable environmental management. The misallocation of resources due to corruption is responsible for the teaming unemployed youths in the country. These unemployed youths (*Almajerri* in the North, *Agbero* in the South West, *Bakassi* boys in the South East and the Niger-Delta militants in the South-South) are now constituting security problems for the country. In the face of failed governance, the majority of Nigerians is now seeking succor in religion. Thus, the analysis of widespread corrupt practices in the public and private establishments cannot be isolated from indoctrinations received from religious organizations. This paper focuses on the downside of the three religions of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. It examined how their indoctrinations are breeding institutional corruption and undermining sustainable development in Nigeria.



**Figure 1: A Map of Nigeria showing the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory**

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The focus of this paper is on corrupt practices in religious circles and how it impedes sustainable development in Nigeria. According to Koppelman (2009:1831), government neutrality toward religion is based on the importance of avoiding religious conflict, alienation of religious minorities, and the danger that religious considerations will introduce a dangerous irrational dogmatism into politics and make democratic compromise more difficult. Religion played a central role in shaping Nigeria's modern political thought. Ilesanmi (1997) examines the complexities arising from the historical consequences of religious politics in a pluralistic Nigerian society. Thus, suggesting an inseparable nexus between religion and politics in Nigeria. Though, defining corruption may be complex, the practice of corruption is easily identifiable. Many scholars have defined corruption in multifarious ways. Clapham (1985) defined corruption as the use of public power to achieve private goals and argues that the socio-political system is held together by allegiance to kingship ties and not by a defined administrative function. According to this work, there is an unchecked institutionalized inequality of power within the colonial structured modern Africa states (Clapham 1985:47-52). This political imbalance coupled with a draught of public accountability makes the abuse of public office inevitable. Examining the phenomenon of corruption among public office holders, Huntington (1968:59) suggested that the absence of effective political institutionalization made public officials to integrate their private lives with political office thereby, abusing the public trust. Corruption, from the economic perspective, refers to the misuse of a position of authority for personal or group benefit or gain involving a breach of legal norms. Corrupt practices in business organizations in developing economies, such as Nigeria leads to organizational inefficiency, reduced foreign investments, reduced economic growth and development, resulting in widespread poverty (Misangyi et.al, 2008:750-770).

In this work, religious corruption is conceptualized as the misuse of a position of authority for personal or group benefit, involving a deliberate breach of legal norms by religious leaders. Onongha (2007:58-59) examined the intersections of corruption and Christian ethics. According to this work, corruption can be traced to the fall of man as recorded in the book of Genesis. Onongha argues that the absence of Christian ethics in the educational curriculum is responsible for the widespread corruption in Nigeria and concluded that the panacea to the Nigerian problem is the integration of Christian ethics into the national curricula. Umachi (2007:68-69) suggested that the Nigerian situation is very similar to the biblical one in terms of corrupt practices. He argues that while some bows to corruption in biblical times others withstood it. Umachi agreed that corruption is real and has shown a corrosive effect in Nigeria and concluded that unless Nigerians tow the example of Paul in his escapade with Felix in the Bible, the country will never win the war against corruption. In a similar perspective, Nwaomah (2007:77-80) asserts that corruption entails an attempt by some people to legitimize inequality by robbing the majority of the commonwealth and appropriating such loot for their self-better. Nwaomah argues that a successful war on corruption requires a holistic effort involving the teaching of Christian ethics in churches.

The trends and pattern of corrupt practices in Nigeria show that sustainable development has continued to elude the country. Development is sustainable if it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Brundtland Report: World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987:43). Advancing this discussion, Soubbotina (2004: 9-10), suggests that in order for development to continue indefinitely, it should balance the interests of different groups of people from generation to generation, and do so simultaneously in three major interrelated areas – economic, social, and environmental. Thus, sustainable development can be defined as equality of socioeconomic and political opportunities in society. Bossel (1999) examines the indicators for sustainable development. According to this work, societies and their environments change and sustainable society must allow and sustain such changes. Bossel argues that some human societies have been sustained in their environment over time by institutionalizing systems of exploitation, injustice, and class privilege (Bossel, 1999: 4-16). Thus, such societies would be socially unsustainable in the long run due to the factor of social injustice.

Assessing the impact of corruption on environmental management, Mendes (2006:31), asserts that corruption is responsible for the deforestation and loss of biodiversity in many regions of the world, through both legal concession given to cronies of the ruling elite and illegal logging. Mendes argues that the cooperation between the elite and corrupt domestic or foreign corporations also undermines inspection policies and leads to rigged regimes making a mockery of sustainable forest and biodiversity management. Attah (2011) examines how the global political economy of agro-fuel intensifies hunger among the countries and rural peoples of Africa. According to Attah, one of the key concerns about agro-fuels are the massive land grabbing, which invariably leads to inadequate food production. Although the impacts of agro-fuels vary by region, in Nigeria, the production of agro-fuels are not aimed at local consumption, but for export. It is such that African staple food crops such as oil palm, cassava, corn, groundnuts, sorghum, sweet potatoes, etc., are being used to produce bio-ethanol. Thus, the emerging agro-fuels reinforce the precarious food security problem. The process and structures of agro-fuels increase pressures on the tropical forests and further wrest control of resources from subsistence farmers and rural peoples (Attah, 2012: 7-12).

Economic policy analysis should be guided by social welfare indicators rather than Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita approach. According to Aidt (2010:32), cross national measures of corruption perception as well as measures of direct experience with corruption are negatively correlated with growth in genuine wealth per capita. Thus, rampant corruption endangers sustainable development. Kates et al (2005:20) argues that achieving consensus on sustainability values and actions is often difficult and painful, different stakeholders' values are forced to the surface, compared and contrasted, criticized and debated. Sometimes individual stakeholders find the process threatening to their own values and either reject the process entirely to pursue their own narrow goals or critique it philosophy. This phenomenon is undermining sustainable development in policy formulation.

In analyzing data emanating from the field, it seems that there is a research gap in the scholarly literature in understanding the dynamics of religious corruption in Nigeria. The dominant perspective in the literature is to see religion as performing very important functions in society. The functionalist perspective emphasizes the contributions of religion in meeting the requirements of society, in the form of social solidarity, value consensus, peace and integration (Haralambos and Heald, 1980:455-457; Andersen and Taylor, 2007:20). This perspective of religion argues that social life is impossible without the shared values and morals which form collective conscience without which there will be disorderliness. This work recognizes the function of religion as an object of either social cohesion or a catalyst for the social - disorder. In analyzing the Nigerian dilemma, religious corruption represents a major problem confronting sustainable development in the country. Crooked indoctrination by disgruntled religious leaders in the form of extreme materialism in Nigerian churches is fostering corruption in Nigeria. The ideology of waging a twenty-first century Jihad involving extra judicial killings of innocent Nigerians in the name of Allah is nothing but corruption. The friendship of notable General Overseer of Churches and Imams with corrupt politicians symbolized an approval of the status-quo. The reluctance of the anti-corruption agencies to probe the finances of religious organizations suggests that the agencies are tolerating corruption. This work advances the functionalist perspective on religion. It agrees that religion serves a dual role in society – as an agent of social cohesion and disorder, emphasis is laid on the later.

### **MAPPING RELIGIOUS CORRUPTION**

Corruption in religious circles is as old as antiquity. Indeed, all religions involved the worship of the supernatural. It is generally believed that organized religion has brought peace and harmony to the world and that its leaders are motivated by the service of their God. However, religion had used fear, hate and sometimes lies to control and manipulate people for the advantage of a selected group of individuals. For instance, the Crusades of the Middle-Ages are a typical example of religious corruption. The name Crusade was applied to the wars against pagan peoples, Christian heretics, and political foes of the papacy (Nicholson, 2004:53-91). The Spanish Inquisition was a judicial institution, established by the papacy in the Middle Ages, charged with seeking out, trying, and sentencing people guilty of heresy. To be a heretic, you did not have to commit a crime. This system was used by the church as a tool of oppression especially against the Jews and Muslims. The penalty for heresy was torture and death (Homza, 2006:252-256). The Jihad of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Northern Nigeria was coined as a war against oppression and syncretism (Falola, 2002). However, the Islamic revolutionaries did not aim at just

purifying Islam; the revolution was embedded on the political ambitions of the Jihadists (Korieh and Nwokeji, 2005:112). The aftermath of the Jihad witnessed a wider division of the society between the ruling class and the ruled; culminating to high level inequalities in the established Caliphate. These examples illustrate how man has used God to justify his greed and quest for power. Examining Biblical approaches to corruption, the Bible asserts:

The Chief Priests pick up the coin and said it is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money. (Mathew, 27:6).

The caption above illustrates the story of the transactions between Judas Iscariot and the Jewish Priesthood in the Bible. When Judas brought back the proceeds he received for betraying Jesus to the Chief Priests, they rejected the money believing it is unclean. In the Nigerian case, it is saddening that despite the spread of Churches and Mosques to every nook and a cranny of Nigeria, corruption is at all time high in the country. Christian Evangelists are using every available media such as Satellite TV, Newspapers, Mobile phones and the Internet to spread the gospel of prosperity and materialism. Today, Money laundry in Nigerian churches is no longer news in the media. Examining this trend, Kukah (2007) suggests that these Pastors are scavenging for fortunes in the name of leading souls to God through the organization of endless spiritual trade fairs called revivals aimed at indoctrinating ordinary citizens away from the culture of hard work and the need to develop a truly Christian ethic to wealth (Kukah, 2007:37-38).

Corrupt indoctrination symbolized by the “get rich quick” sermons in some Nigerian churches are pushing Christians into corrupt practices. Nowadays, churches now judge the commitment of their members by equating their contributions to project at par with their employment status or business standing. This approach is pushing many church members to commit financial crimes in order to meet their church expectations. A case in view is that of the Bank-PHB ex-boss, Atuche who paid the sum of N45million to a Church as Tithes from stolen money. The money was paid to two Catholic Church branches in Delta State through a bank transfer from Bank PHB Mortgage Limited accounts (Ogunbumi, 2012).

The issue of the first fruit as an obligation to believers appeared in 64 verses of the Bible. Some of the verses are presented as follows:

Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first-fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine (Proverbs 3:9-10).

We obligate ourselves to bring the first-fruits of our ground and the first-fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord (Nehemiah 10:35).

Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first-fruits of all your produce (Proverbs 3:9).

And the first of all the first-fruits of all kinds, and every offering of all kinds from all your offerings, shall belong to the priests. You shall also give to the priests the first of your dough, that a blessing may rest on your house (Ezekiel 44:30).

In the twenty-first century, an empirical interpretation of the above verses seems to define the first-fruit as a marginal increment such as, the first salary increment or the first turnover in a business transaction. However, in a recent survey, it was discovered that the interpretation of the “first fruit” in some churches refers to the January salary of every church member (participant observation in some churches at Akure, Ibadan, Ilorin, Lagos – March 2010 to September 2012). Thus, a church member who submitted his monthly salary to the church in the name of “first fruit” may likely engage in financial crimes in order to survive. Another case of church corruption is the case of Sheraton Hotels and Towers Versus Lawrence Agada. In 2002, it was discovered that Lawrence Agada (a Pastoral Assistant with Christ Embassy Church) stole N39, 000,000 over a period of time from the Sheraton Hotel, Lagos, where he worked as a cashier. Surprisingly, Agada paid the bulk of the stolen funds as tithes and offerings to a parish of Christ Embassy Church, Lagos. In reaction to his generosity, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome (the General Overseer of the church), gave him a commendation letter. Eventually, the theft was discovered, the Church admitted receiving the stolen funds but declined a refund. Referring to the incident, Rasheed (2003:30) posits:

In March, a Pastoral Assistant with Christ Embassy, Lawrence Agada, who “s also a staff of Sheraton Hotels and Towers, Ikeja, was held over the fraud totaling N39 million. When he was interrogated by the police, Agada confessed that he used the larger amount of the money in helping the gospel in Christ Embassy (Rasheed, 2003 cited in Abioje, 2011).

In this way, the church is fueling corruption through crooked indoctrination. Another recent trend in some Nigerian Churches, is the “Seed Offering”, this is a fund raising service conducted by some churches. The “Seed Offering” session involves challenging church members to donate a huge amount of money to the church with the promise that they will receive the money back in folds through a spiritual magic (participant observation in some churches at Akure, Ibadan, Ilorin, Lagos – March 2010 to September 2012). This “empty your pocket evangelism” is characterized by the twisting of biblical standards in order to swindle unsuspecting over-zealous worshippers.

The Islamic religion is not left out. The origin of morality in Islam can be traced to the eschatological framework provided by God in the Qur’an. The Qur’an emphasizes abhorrence of everything evil (*Haram*) and *Al-munkar* (Izutsu, 2002:213-239; Danjibo, 2009:7). The later refers to what is disapproved precisely because it is unknown and foreign to Islam. The word *Al-Munkar* appears in fifteen verses of the Qur’an. Some of these verses are as follows:

O you who believe! Follow not the footsteps of Shaitan (Satan). And whosoever follows the footsteps of Shaitan (Satan), then, verily he commands *Al-Fahsha'* (indecent) and *Al-Munkar* (to do what is foreign to Islam). And had it not been for the Grace of Allah and His Mercy on you, not one of you would ever have been pure from



sins. But Allah purifies (guides to Islam) whom He wills, and Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower (An-Noor, 24:21).

Verily, you practice sodomy with men, and rob the wayfarer (travelers)! And practice Al-Munkar (to do what is foreign to Islam) in your meetings." But his people gave no answer except that they said: "Bring Allah's Torment upon us if you are one of the truthful (Al-Ankaboot, 29:29).

What has been revealed to you of the Book (the Qur'an), and perform As-Salat (Iqamat-as-Salat). Verily, As-Salat (the prayer) prevents from Al-Fahsha' (i.e. great sins of every kind, unlawful sexual intercourse) and Al-Munkar (to do what is foreign to Islam) and the remembering (praising) of (you by) Allah (in front of the angels) is greater indeed than your remembering of Allah in prayers. And Allah knows what you do (Al-Ankaboot, 29:45).

Except those who believe (in Islamic Monotheism) and do righteous good deeds, and recommend one another to the truth (Al-Ma'ruf) which Allah has ordained, and abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds (*Haram*), and recommend one another to patience for the sufferings, harms, and injuries which one may encounter in Allah's Cause during preaching His religion of Islamic Monotheism or Jihad (Al-Asr, 103:3).

This open ended stance of the Qur'an on the concept of *Al-Munkar* and *Haram* had been misinterpreted by some radical sects within the Islamic religion. Historically, Islam owes its expansion to the use of force. It is interesting to note that some Muslims, especially the adherents of the *Kharijite*, have elevated the holy war (Jihad), as the sixth pillar of Islam (Armajani, 1986:47; Cook, 2007:18). There are numerous references in the *Qu'ran* instigating Muslim's to fight for the expansion of the Islamic empire and its philosophies:

Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful to you; but it may happen that ye hate what is good for you (Khan, 2:216)

Then when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them captive and besiege them and prepare for them each ambush (Khan, 9:5).

In these verses and others lies the strength of the Islamic expansion. The word *Jihad* means striving and moderate Islamic sects uses it in the sense of striving against poverty, ignorance and other social ills. The *Qu'ran* encourages Muslims to do that which is *halal* "permitted" and to refrain from that which is *haram* "evil". It should be noted that these doctrines evolved from a cultural environment however, it is only logical for it to be reviewed in order to suit another culture. Thus, there seems

to be a challenge in locating the doctrines emanating from the *Qu'ran* in the modern society. The attempt of religious leaders to adopt these doctrines hook-line and sinker with added embellishments to suit their own interest in the modern world is corrupt.

Starting from the *Maitatsine* crisis in 1980, the growth of ethno-religious conflicts have been tremendous in Nigeria (Adesoji, 2010:95; Attah, 2012:2-3). The history of terrorism and religious fundamentalism in Nigeria could be traced from *Maitatsine* riots of the early eighties. The *Maitatsine* religious sect was founded by late Malam Muhammadu Marwa alias Allah Ta-Tsine or *Maitatsine*. With an ideology that was opposed to most aspects of modernization and to all Western influence. The group unleashed acts of terrorism against the state. The sect also decried modern innovations such as radios, wrist watches, automobiles, motorcycles, and even bicycles. Those who use these things or who read books other than the Qur'an were considered to be infidels. In the *Maitatsine* crisis, 4,177 people were murdered (Adebayo, 2010:215). Reconstructing the history of this event, Falola (2001: 143) asserts:

He (Malam Muhammadu Marwa) was a Qur'anic teacher and preacher. Forceful, persuasive and charismatic, he rebelled against many popular opinions among Kano Islamic circles, denouncing certain parts of the Holy Qur'an and even criticizing Prophet Muhammad... he revealed himself to be an annabi; a prophet with divine power and a mission to save the world...He was alleged to have replaced the name of the Prophet Muhammad with his own in personal copies of the Qur'an...He was opposed to most aspects of modernization and to all Western influence.

The Kano incident stands out for being the first religious crisis that took a huge toll on human lives and property. However, in 2002, another group (*Boko-Haram*) with a similar ideology emerged from Northern Nigeria. In order to justify their ends, it may be inferred that the *Boko-Haram* sect had deliberately interpreted the concepts of *Haram* and *Al-Munkar* to be anything secular in order to wage a war against the non-Muslims in the country. Hence, the sect had declared war on Western institutions in Nigeria and called for the implementation of the *Sharia* law in a secular country (Aleyomi, 2012:132-133; Adesoji, 2010:96). The *Boko-Haram* sect has adopted tactics similar to *al-Qaeda* operations and often engages the services of suicide bombers against churches and other Western Institutions. Significant among these attacks are the August 2011 bombing of the United Nations building in Abuja claiming the lives of 21 people and the 2011 Christmas Day attack on a Catholic church in Madalla near Abuja, killing about 44 people. In the early hours of Tuesday, October 2, 2012, the Islamic sect launched an attack similar to those of the Rwanda genocide, against a students' hostel in Mubi, Adamawa State killing several innocent students. The *Boko-Haram* militants went from room to room dividing people on ethno-religious lines. In the *Mubi-Massacre*, those considered to be non-Muslims were murdered. Indeed, this kind of terrorism is a calculated step by some disgruntled elements to create an atmosphere of insecurity in the country by maneuvering the Islamic religion.

Though, *Boko-Haram* operations were noticeable within the Nigeria political space since 2002, the operations of the group received momentum after the 2011 presidential elections. It is no gainsaying that many ambitious Northern politicians such as General Mohammadu Buhari (rtd) and Mr. Abubakar Atiku were embittered by the outcome of the general elections. In a

reaction against the position of President Good luck Jonathan to contest the 2011 elections, members of the Northern Elders Political Leaders Forum were reported to have asserted their determination to make Nigeria ungovernable should he win the election (Olupohunda, 2012). In a similar development, challenging President Jonathan candidacy in the 2011 elections, Lawal Kaita, a founding member of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and a close ally of former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar (Jonathan major opponent in the election) posits:

The North is determined, if that happens, to make the country ungovernable for President Jonathan or any other Southerner who finds his way to the seat of power on the platform of the PDP against the principle of the party's zoning policy (Johnson, 2012).

President Jonathan won the election and the North erupted in violence as a reaction to Gen. Muhammadu Buhari's (a Northern candidate) loss. It can therefore be argued that *Boko-Haram* is a reaction of the most populated Muslim North against a Southern Christian presidency - a reflection of political partisanship and ethno-religious intolerance in Nigeria. This suggests that the sect is camouflaged as a religious movement in order to receive necessary logistic support from the transnational radical Islamic networks. This is how far religious corruption can go in undermining the national integrity and sovereignty of a State.

African Traditional Religion is indigenous to Africa and handed down from generation to generation (Adasu, 1985: 15). It is also a part and parcel of the African culture and a system of thought. Africa Traditional Religion is pluralistic. Indeed, all African ethnic groups practice their own distinct religion. Its mode of worship, sacred materials and shrines are derived from the African environment. The disposition to trace the breakdown of societal values to the coming of Christianity and Islam is a major tendency among practitioners of the African Traditional Religion. Egberongbe argues that foreign religion has led to an irresponsible pattern of leadership in Nigeria (Egberongbe, 1988:124, cited in Simbine, 2011). For centuries, African Traditional Religion has demonstrated a high level of discipline inform of ethics and moral values. In ATR, spirits communicate the catalogue of ethical standards required of the adherents. For instance, the *Orunmila* cult in South Western Nigeria prescribes the type of (white) dress and (honest and hygienic) behavior of its worshippers. According to tradition, African Traditional Religion administers instant justice against wrong doing in society. The *Sango* deity often strikes offenders with thunder while *Ayelala* kills by engulfing its victim's stomach with water. It is interesting to note that these powers are still potent in African societies and science is yet to unravel the mystery. However, this does not isolate ATR from corruption. There are instances where African deities were manipulated to perpetuate injustice. For instance, rampant ritual murders and the use of ATR to aid Advanced Fee Fraud (*419/Yahooplus*) and armed-robbery are some of the ways ATR is fueling corruption in Nigeria. *YahooPlus* is an elevated form of cyber fraud. It involves performing various rituals to brighten the swindler's chances of getting his victims hypnotized to keep remitting money from any location in the world (Personal Communication: Lagos, Ibadan, Akure, Ilorin, Abuja, Kaduna –February to October, 2012). It can therefore be deduced that ATR cannot function without the human agent. Hence, it is subject to human cravings and corrupt practices once its encryption is decoded by the skilled master swindler.

Examining the trend and pattern of religious corruption in Nigeria, John Egbeazien Oshodi (the Secretary-General of Nigeria Psychological Association), asserts:

In theory, the understanding of what could be termed Religious Corruption Syndrome should be seen as a function of both the chronic abuses of religious practices and the impact of pervasive dishonesty in individuals and across various faith communities in Nigeria... The toxic aspects of Nigerian-oriented religions appear to have deep impact on the psychological connection to the deep sense of dishonesty... With further attachment to one's religion, some Nigerians appear to see enormous personal conforming behaviours which could include cycles of dishonesty, being defensive and blaming of others for one's confusion... There appears to be emotional/spiritual satisfaction from being religious and committing oneself to a corrupt lifestyle and living (Oshodi, "Let's Call it Religious Corruption Syndrome" The Punch Newspaper, February 27, 2012 Retrieved on 28/10/12 from <http://www.punchng.com/opinion/lets-call-it-religious-corruption-syndrome/>).

According to Oshodi, the double conditioning from both religious and immoral beliefs creates symbols of responsibility and a mindset of obligation to do more dishonesty.

#### **CORRUPTION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Nigeria is the largest country in Africa with a population of 158 million people and accounts for 47 percent of West Africa's population. It is also the biggest oil exporter in Africa, with the largest natural gas reserves in the continent (World Bank, 2012. "Nigerian Overview: Economic Overview and Performance"). With these large reserves of human and natural resources, Nigeria is expected to build a prosperous economy, significantly reduce poverty, and provide health, education and infrastructure services to its population needs. However, the reverse is the case as about 84% of Nigerian population lives below poverty level (World Bank, 2012. "World Development Indicators").

Corruption has been the bane of economic development in Nigeria. The spread of corruption in both public and private sectors translates to poor public investment, unemployment, poverty and insecurity (Ackerman, 1999:2-3). In the public sector, corruption reduces government revenues through tax evasion and exemption. It directs government spending away from education and health to white elephant projects such as the failed Ajaokuta Steel industry and the National ID card project. The misallocation of resources due to corruption is responsible for the teaming unemployed youths in the country. These unemployed youths (*Almajerri* in the North, *Agbero* in the South West, *Bakassi* boys in the South East and the Niger-Delta militants in the South-South) are often recruited as political thugs or terrorists by disgruntled politicians and opportunist religious leaders. The *Boko-Haram* insurgency is a testimony to this fact. Buttressing this standpoint, Hillary Clinton (The America Secretary of State) posits:

The most immediate source of the disconnect between Nigeria's wealth and its poverty is the failure of governance at the federal, state and local levels...Lack of transparency and accountability has eroded the legitimacy of the government and contributed to the rise of groups that embrace violence and reject the authority of

the state” (Clinton, “Nigeria: Lack of Good Governance”, The Nation, Friday, August 14, 2009, p.1).

The pandemic corrupt practices by Nigerians in the private and public sector of the economy has jeopardized the potentials of the country to establish sustainable development. In recent times, corruption has extended into the legislature. The recent oil subsidy bribery saga involving a prominent lawmaker, Alhaji Lawan Farouk, is a case of corruption in high places. Nigeria’s main anti-corruption agency, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), has filed corruption charges against about 40 nationally prominent political figures at the federal and state levels. The EFCC has secured few convictions of these criminals. Even the ones convicted were given little or no prison time. The EFCC is handicapped due to lack of adequate institutional independence from the executive. The chairman of the organization was appointed by the President and thus, answerable to the executive arm of government. Also, the anti-corruption agency lack innovation. For instance, religious institutions have become a conduit for laundering funds without effective prosecution. Evaluating the effect of corruption on national development, Ezekwesili, (2012) asserts:

It can be concluded that corruption clearly goes along with a low GDP, inequality of income, inflation, increased crime, policy distortions and lack of competition... countries can be trapped in a vicious circle where corruption lowers income, increases inequality, inflation, crime, policy distortions and helps monopolies at the expense of competition. These developments in turn escalate corruption. There is a heavy burden placed on instrumental variable technique in trying to disentangle these mutual dependencies. There is strong evidence that corruption lowers a country’s attractiveness to international and domestic investors. This reduces capital accumulation and lowers capital inflows. Also the productivity of capital suffers from corruption. There is equally strong evidence that corruption distorts government expenditure and reduces the quality of a wide variety of government services, such as public investment, health care, tax revenue and environmental control.

Thus, corruption in any form is detrimental to national development. Corruption spreads poverty and poverty encourages corruption thereby resulting in gross welfare losses and a perpetual cycle of underdevelopment.

## **CONCLUSION**

This work examines the function of religion in the Nigerian society. It was discovered that religion in the country serves as a catalyst for social disorder. Many religious organizations in Nigeria now function as a conduit for money laundry and the groundswell for terrorism. Corruption is now instituted in Nigeria - it is not only a practice but a system of thought. According to the 2011 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), Nigeria ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Studies reveal that corruption threatens foreign direct investment and prevents sustainable development. Despite the abundant natural and human resources in the country, poverty continues to ravage families and the poor bears the burden of having to pay bribes as a condition of accessing essential services such as education, water, health, and electricity.

In Nigeria, widespread corruption undermines economic growth, national security and the ecosystem, on which we and future generations depend. The misallocation of resources due to corruption is responsible for the teeming unemployed youths and the wave of insecurity in the country. In the face of failed governance, the majority of Nigerians seeks succor in religion. However, in the quest for economic and political benefits, religious organizations seizes the opportunity to manipulate their teeming congregations through fraudulent doctrines. The unethical indoctrinations emanating from religious leaders creates symbols of responsibility and a mindset of obligation to do more dishonesty. The culprits are inspired and motivated by the teachings of religious organizations as evidenced in the cases examined in this work. Hence, the trajectories of religious expansion vis-à-vis corruption in the country are complementary. To check this menace, the anti-corruption agencies and the legislature must initiate laws that will address corruption in religious circles. Religious leaders should be made accountable for the funds received and the doctrines propagated by their organizations. In order to achieve sustainable development, policy makers should put in cognizance developmental indicators such as vision, holistic approach, social equity, time consciousness, organized framework, and transparency.

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