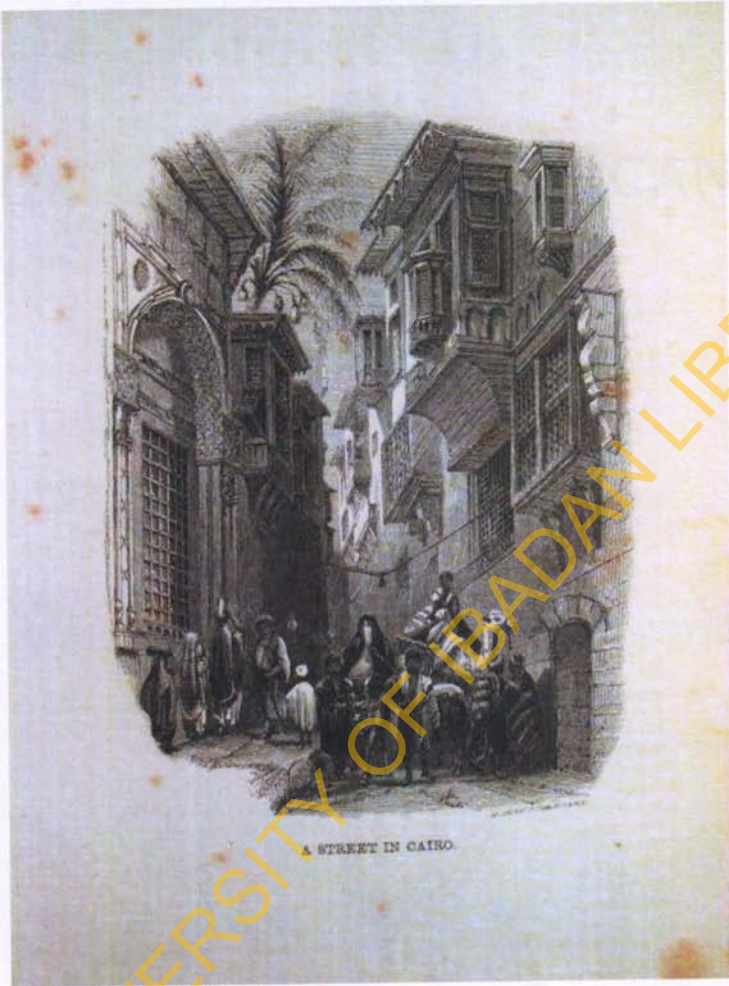


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OF  
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(W. H. Bartlett, *The Nile Boat: or Glimpses of the Land of Egypt*, New York 1851).

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## JOURNAL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

The *JOAS* is an international academic organ, which claims to be an independent and pluralist review for the promotion of Asian and African studies. Contributions of scholars and scientists from all over the world are invited.

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MUBARAK ADEMOLA NOIBI

## POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND THE NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIC ENVIRONMENT: THE ROLE OF RELIGION

### Introduction

Corruption is pandemic in man and will probably remain in him for some time to come. It is synonymous with poverty, which is known to man in all ages. Corruption is not prone to a definition as it is a relative phenomenon that can only be recognized when it occurs. This is because it is usually treated in accordance to the norms of its context and not according to universal standards<sup>1</sup>. However, from the Islamic point of view, corruption which is often referred to as *fasād*, takes different forms and is also universal and not particular. In other words, what is termed as evil at the North Pole is evil at the South Pole. This often includes shameful and universally detestable manners of conduct. It could apply solitarily or collectively. It includes behaviors such as fornication, stealing, armed robbery, terrorism, illegal killing of a fellow human being and subservience to deities other than Allah.

In this work, we are concerned with political corruption. In this context, political corruption is not a collection of incoherent phenomena, but a governmental system capable of being steered with tolerable precision by those in authority<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, a glance is made at the political corruption of the Nigerian body with a view to offering an Islamic panacea to this destructive element in the society.

### Definition of Corruption

Although, there is no precise definition of corruption, analysts have put forward a number of definitions despite the fact that features of corruption in one region are not the same in another. It includes all forms of behaviors

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1. P.O. Ocheje, "Law and Social change. A Socio-Legal Analysis of Nigeria's Corrupt practices and other Related Offences Act, 2000". *Journal of African Law*, Vol. No 45, 2, 2001, p. 179.

2. J.J. Van Waveren (1964), "Historical and Cultural Condition of Political Corruption among the Hausa: Comment", *Journal of Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. No. 2, 1964. p. 195.

from "Venality to ideological erosion"<sup>3</sup>. In other words, one who accepts monetary inducement to perform illegal operation which is within his reach and ability can be said to be corrupt. In addition, a Yoruba man of Nigerian ethnic affiliation can be said to be corrupt if he travels to a western country and then imbibes their way of life in deviance to that of his cultural background.

However, on a narrower definition, which is more pragmatic and popular, corruption is a behavior that shifts loyalty from the conventional practices of the public service rule to private (personal, close family, private clique) "pecuniary or status gains". This is a result of satisfying personal inclinations or even breaking the rules against the exercise of certain types of private influence<sup>4</sup>. This includes bribery, misappropriation of public funds and nepotism. It excludes some behavior regarded as offensive to moral standards. Included in this exclusion, is any behavior which is done in public interest<sup>5</sup>. Corruption is articulated from every definition as "improper" and "illegitimate"<sup>6</sup>. There are three main approaches to the term improper in its conceptualization. These are public opinion, public interest and legal norms<sup>7</sup>. It would be worthwhile to discuss these approaches one after the other. The public interest approach views improper, any behavior that goes against public interest on the part of public office holders. This translates to public administrators' setting aside the 'general interest' in favor of specific groups in return for gratification or certain rewards. Nevertheless, a good majority of what public administrators or political office holders do is backed up by the argument of public good or interest. This definition is, therefore, deficient in that it suffers from vagueness of irreparable nature<sup>8</sup>.

The formal legal approach to the conceptualization of the term "improper" in the definition of corruption, views it as one which violates specific rules governing the way public responsibilities are discharged as "illegal exchanges" of political goods for private rewards<sup>9</sup>. This is also vague as it is relative due to its difference from one state or country to another. It also changes from time to time as a response to manipulation. Furthermore,

3. J.S. Nye, "Corruption and Political Development: A Cost-Benefit Analysis". *The Aerial Political Science Review*. Vol. 61, No. 2, 1967. p. 419.

4. J.S. Nye, op. cit., p. 419.

5. J.S. Nye, op. cit., p. 419.

6. W.Sandlioliz and W. Koezle, "Accounting for Corruption: Economic Structure, Democracy and Tribe", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 1, 2000, p. 34.

7. W.Sandlioliz and W. Koezle, op. cit., p. 34.

8. W.Sandlioliz and W. Koezle, op. cit., p. 34.

9. W.Sandlioliz and W. Koezle, op. cit., p. 34.



it excludes acts that may be illegal but which are commonly regarded as improper<sup>10</sup>.

The public opinion-based approach conceptualizes as improper, attitudes which a particular community views as corrupt. The problem this approach faces is that it does not specify the ideological frame of mind of the public, whether politically conscious or not or even if it takes into consideration the whole population of a state or a community. Another factor is that public opinion varies according to groups or geographical areas within a state and across time<sup>11</sup>.

At the center of the definition of corruption, though specific to a region or state, are three elements. These elements diverge from formal; public role for private regarding pecuniary or status gain. Secondly, it involves an exchange in which a party induces the other in exchange for administrative advantages or political good. Lastly, these exchanges are improper as they violate the established norms<sup>12</sup>.

### Causes of Corruption

Scholars have identified different causes of corruption. These can be classified into four major factors. Firstly, the customs, attitudes and habit. Secondly, the pressure on officials. Thirdly, the environment and lastly ethnicity. These will be explained as follow.

Firstly, customs, attitudes and habits include the gifts given as an expression of goodwill or regard for partners and consensual leaders, and tributes offered to authoritarian rulers. Others are constellations of attitudes such as inordinate love for material wealth either as a community, group or on individual bases<sup>13</sup>. Oliver de Sardan identified certain norms generally applicable in contemporary Africa which either "communicates" or influence the practice of corruption. He named six social "logics" which "underlie a number of common behavioral traits". These include negotiation which is prevalent in African countries and which like corruption involves costs. The practice of corruption benefit from bargaining and corruption<sup>14</sup>.

Secondly, is pressure on public officials. Public office holders may face the temptation of corruption due to poverty. They therefore, try to maximize their opportunities. It is also customary for kith and kin men to lay many

10. W.Sandlioliz and W. Koezle, op. cit., p. 34.

11. W.Sandlioliz and W. Koezle, op. cit., p. 34.

12. W.Sandlioliz and W. Koezle, op. cit., 34.

13. W.N. Brownsberger, "Development and Government Corruption Materialism and Political Fragmentation in Nigeria", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. No. 2, 1983, p. 216.

14. P.O. Ocheje, op. cit., p. 185.

demands on their legal but inadequate regular income. These could compel such office holders to enrich themselves to the detriment of the public<sup>15</sup>.

Thirdly, is the political environment which, more quite often than not, witnesses the exclusion of the wealthy from political authority just as the unpopular class or ethnic minority are excluded in a society. Hence, corruption may be a safe haven for the wealthy to influence decision making in public circles. They may also build political machines through which public goods are distributed in return for electoral votes<sup>16</sup>. Last of the causes of corruption to be treated here is ethnicity. Before colonialism, warring groups in some regions were always at each other's throats. Colonialists on taking over of territories, pacified these various warring factions and set up Administrative Districts. However, after Independence, these factions were forced to cooperate. Politicians in these regions felt that their authorities were a collection of resources and opportunities for self-dealing and that patronage and corrupt exchanges would be binding for ruling the various coalition groups<sup>17</sup>.

### Benefits of Corruption

There is no consensus between the argument of the revisionist and the moralists concerning the possibility of developmental benefits in corruption. The benefits of corruption according to various analysts range from economic development to national integration. Each of these "benefits" is treated thus:

Firstly, is economic development. This implies that corruption might be a vital source of capital formation when private capital is scarce and government is denied the ability to tax a surplus from workers openly. However, it is pertinent to note that this illegitimate capital is often not put to use but deposited at foreign secret bank accounts where they eventually wind up. Part of the economic benefits is entrepreneurship and incentive. These entrepreneurship and incentive will only be real, if there is an ideological bias against private incentives in a state. Corruption thus, provides a major means by which a developing state can take advantage of in fostering economic growth. In the same vein, it may help a minority group overcome corruption by influencing decisions in political circles through wealth<sup>18</sup>.

Secondly, national integrations may also occur in the advent of corruption. In this, excluded groups, the elites and non-elites in the state and the divisions between the ruling class and the wealthy are harmonized thus

15. W.N. Brownsberger, op. cit., p. 218.

16. W.N. Brownsberger, op. cit., p. 218.

17. W.N. Brownsberger, op. cit., p. 219.

18. J.S. Nye, op. cit., p. 420.

becoming assimilated into each other. As for the non-elites, corruption transforms them from their traditional peasant lives to modern lives<sup>19</sup>. Examples of these are manifested in the offering of gratification to public administrators to be able to access legitimate social wages in some sub-urban areas.

### Costs of Corruption

Moralists have identified a number of disadvantages in corruption. They include wastage of resources, instability and capacity reduction. These are discussed as follow;

Wastage of resources hinders economic development or sometimes directs it in socially less desirable direction. Capital accumulated through it, often winds up in secret foreign bank accounts. Investments are also channeled into areas of less importance such as construction because of its susceptibility to the addition of cost-plus. Skills are often wasted as top echelon of political class who are supposed to be busy directing the state into prosperity wallow in self aggrandizement and enrichment, thereby wasting away their scarce skills. Due to this ugly situation, International Aid Agencies shift their base from granting aids to such a country with the belief that they will be wasted through corruption<sup>19</sup>.

Instability is another outcome of corruption. In rare cases, it leads to political revolution or military takeovers<sup>20</sup>. Although, military takeovers provide excuse for its executors, they are more often than not found to be more corrupt than their predecessors<sup>21</sup>. Corruption also reduces government's capability through the reduction of administrative capacity. By this token, civil servants who constitute a scarce resource and who prefer to be honest may exile themselves from the corrupt state or even reduce their conscientious effort. These therefore, lead to a considerable opportunity cost which may take the shape of restriction of government programmes due to fear that new programmes may not scale through the hurdle of success<sup>22</sup>.

### Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption is wide spread in Nigeria. This was said to have preceded colonization. In fact, the British Colonial Administration had to remove some native Fulani office-holders who were considered most venal. This was between 1900 and 1920. However, they tolerated daily corruption in their

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19. J.S. Nye, *op. cit.*, p. 420.

20. J.S. Nye, *op. cit.*, pp. 421-422.

21. J.S. Nye, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

22. J.S. Nye, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

administration<sup>23</sup>. During the visit of the National Convention of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), a national political party, to London in 1947, British bureaucrats expressed shock at the “mountains of luggage” which were brought with them. This became more surprising as they balked at staying at the accommodation provided for them. They instead lodged at a British hotel at a cost which was widely extravagant to British officials<sup>24</sup>. At independence in 1960, Nigerians began to assume top positions in the public service. The nature and manifestations of corruption in that period was kept to a manageable level as best described by Chinua Achebe in his novels “No longer at ease” and “A man of the people”<sup>25</sup>.

On the contrary, the situation went out of hand in the 70s when, due to the Middle East war of 1973, there was an astronomical rise in oil prices and revenues which paved the way for unprecedented lavish national expenditure<sup>26</sup>. This was a rare opportunity of leveraging its new God given wealth for real development and the laying of foundation for economic and political future. However, this was wasted in white elephant projects which served as conduct pipes for transferring public wealth into secret bank accounts and private pockets.

The 80s witnessed a myriad of money skimming stratagems as the opening of “dedicated account” with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to fund developmental projects. In the long run, these funds disappeared without any trace<sup>27</sup>. The fertilizer factory located at Onne, near Port Harcourt was mis-managed. The telecommunication's system as well as the energy sector consumed valuable amount of money with no improvement over their services for over three decades<sup>28</sup>. Ajaokuta steel works which started in the 70's has consumed billions of dollars despite its being a skeleton of itself<sup>29</sup>. These are just a tip of the iceberg as corruption is a furtive affair; making documentation extremely difficult. Besides, the proportion of cases that come to light in Nigeria are estimated to be extremely low<sup>30</sup>. The Federal

23. R. L. Tignor, “Political Corruption in Nigeria before independence”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 31 No. 2. 1993, p. 179.

24. R. L. Tignor, op. cit., p. 183.

25. P.O. Ocheje, op. cit., p. 176.

26. V. Eker “On the origins of Corruption: Irregular Incentives in Nigeria”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 19 No. 1. 1981, p. 179.

27. P.O. Ocheje, op. cit., p. 176.

28. P.O. Ocheje, op. cit., p. 176.

29. BBC News, *Nigeria Confronts Corruption*, BBC Online Network. 11/11/1999 <http://news.bbc.com.uk>.

30. V. Eker, op. cit., p. 178.

Ministry of Justice in its publication in 1980, suspected the figure to be as high as 87.5%<sup>31</sup>.

An International Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) called Transparency International makes attempts at measuring corruption based on collection, analysis and dissemination of information on the damaging impact of corruption on human and economic improvements. This methodology is called "Corruption Perception Index (CPI) which ranks countries according to the extent to which they are perceived globally as corrupt. This CPI has been an annual publication since 1995<sup>32</sup>. Its scores have been converted to run from 0 to 10 scales, where 0 represents the least corrupt and 10 the most corrupt<sup>33</sup>. Between 1999 and 2002, Nigeria's CPI stood at 8.65<sup>34</sup>, making it the second most corrupt country after Bangladesh which stood at 9.20<sup>35</sup>. This was coming at a time when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its news letter in 2004, claimed that extreme poverty increased from 36% to 70% in the country<sup>36</sup>. Various measures such as the setting up of Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission [ICPC], the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission [EFCC], and the Code of Conduct Bureau were put in place to stem the tide of corruption. Although, these agencies have been active in their jobs, they have not been able to stamp out corruption in the society.

### Islam and Corruption

It is imperative for a man to ponder on four fundamental questions. These questions include; how he came to be on earth, why he is there, how to fulfill his purpose on it and where he would proceed to from it. It should be noted that great philosophers have not been able to provide answers to these fundamental questions. However, Islam provides answers to these questions. It teaches that man was created from nothingness to existence and that the purpose of man's creation is to serve Allah and that he will return to Him to give an account of his stewardship.

In other for man to attain salvation in the hereafter, he needs to be guided by his Lord. In guiding man therefore, Allah has sent His guidance

31. V. Eker, op. cit., p. 178.

32. Central Bank of Nigeria, *Nigeria Development prospectus: poverty Assessment and Alleviation*, p.n 1999, p. 15.

33. W. Sandholtz and M. M Gray, "International Integration and National Corruption", *International Organisation*, vol. 57. No. 4. 2003, p. 793.

34. W. Sandholtz and M. M Gray, op. cit., p. 792.

35. W. Sandholtz and M. M Gray, *International Integration and National Corruption*, p. 790.

36. O. Idris and A.D. Subair "Nigeria's resources Mismanged-IMF", *Nigerian Tribune*. 13, 370, May 2004, p. 1.

which serves as man's A-Z and a constitution to him Allah affirms this when He says:

إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَىٰ

Verily, We take upon ourselves to guide (Q 92:12).

This message was sent to man through His chain of messengers at different times with them serving as examples of practicability of the guidance. It is then logical for these messengers to be able to give an account of their stewardship to their Lord for assessment. This Allah refers to in the Qur'an when He says:

يَوْمَ يَجْمَعُ اللَّهُ الرُّسُلَ فَيَقُولُ مَاذَا أُجِبْتُمْ قَالُوا لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ

One day will Allah gather the messengers together and ask: "what was the response you received (from men to your teaching). They will say: we have no knowledge! It is You who knows in full all that is hidden (Q 5: 109).

Since these messengers equally delivered their messages from the One and Only Creator, man will have no excuse against Allah's judgment on the Last Day. This is made clear when Allah says in the Qur'an:

رُسُلًا مُّبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَى اللَّهِ حُجَّةٌ بَعْدَ الرُّسُلِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

Messengers who gave good news as well as warning that, mankind (after coming) of the messengers, should not have plea against Allah: For Allah is Exalted in Power Wise' (Q4:165).

A Muslim must believe in the existence of Angels, some of whom record man's deeds. On the Day of Judgement, whose belief constitute another fundamental aspect of a Muslim's creed, the record of man's deeds will be made open and he (man) will be in a position to judge himself in accordance to his deeds. Allah indicates this in the Qur'an when He says:

وَكُلُّ إِنْسَانٍ أَلْزَمْنَاهُ طَائِرَهُ فِي عُنُقِهِ وَنُخْرِجُ لَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ كِتَابًا يَلْقَاهُ مَنْشُورًا  
اقْرَأْ كِتَابَكَ كَفَىٰ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا

Every man's face we have fastened on his own neck: on the Day of Judgement, We shall bring out for him a scroll which he will see spread open. (It will be said to him) "Read your (own) record: Sufficient is your soul this day to make out an account of yourself (Q17:13-14).

Islam also condemns all forms of illegal acquisition of wealth as prevalent in the definition of corruption as an exchange for an illegal service.

This kind of wealth acquisition is called "primitive acquisition". This is evident in the Qurān which says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْأَخْبَارِ وَالرُّهْبَانِ لَيَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ النَّاسِ بِالْبَاطِلِ  
وَيَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ يَكْنِزُونَ الذَّهَبَ وَالْفِضَّةَ وَلَا يُنْفِقُونَهَا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ  
فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

O ye who believe, there are indeed among the priest and anchorites who in falsehood devour the substances of men and hinder from the way of Allah. And there are those who bury gold and silver and spend it not in the Way of Allah: Announce unto them a most grievous penalty (Q9:34).

Public servants and political office holders should realise the fact that cheating on the masses in the form of embezzlement and misappropriation of their funds will be recompensed on Judgement Day. They will be made to return the various properties they have embezzled. This will be at a time when the performance of good works will be late. These corrupt officials are spiritually bankrupt in the sense that they will be great losers on the Day of Judgment. Even when they have performed several good deeds and have kept upright the fundamentals of Islam, their oppressive deeds will still count against them. These individuals are termed bankrupt individuals [*muflis*]. The prophet explained this by saying:

أتدرون ما المفلس؟ قالوا المفلس فينا من لا درهم له ولا متاع. إن المفلس من أمتي يأتي يوم القيامة بصلاة وصيام وزكاة ويأتي قد شتم هذا وقذف هذا وأكل مال هذا وسفك دم هذا وضرب هذا فيعطي هذا من حسناته وهذا من حسناته فإن فنيت حسناته قبل أن يقضى ما عليه أخذ من خطاياهم فطرحت عليه ثم طرح في النار

Do you know who a bankrupt person is? They (companions of the prophet) said, the bankrupt person among us is he who has neither money nor food. He (the Prophet then) said, the bankrupt person from my community will come on the Day of Judgement with obligatory prayer (*salāh*), fasting (*sawm*) and compulsory almsgiving (*zakāh*). He has also abused this, slandered this, embezzled the fund of this, shed the blood of this and struck this. Therefore, recompense will be made from his deeds. Then, when his deeds get exhausted, their evil deeds

will be put into his account and as a result, he will be thrown into hell fire<sup>37</sup>.

### Recommendations

To drastically reduce the influence of this pandemic situation on the masses and in particular the public office holders, the following steps are needed to be taken. These steps include:

(i) Governments at all levels should make the learning of the teaching of individual person's religion compulsory in primary and secondary schools. This is in a bid to make pupils get acquainted with the true teachings of their religion which will definitely reflect in their personal interactions.

(ii) Teaching of accountability in the hereafter as contained in Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR) should be incorporated in the General Studies Programme (GSP) in the Nigeria's tertiary Institutions. This will enable students to not only learn their professions, but also learn to be conscientious and God conscious in them.

(iii) A National Council of Religions should be set up. This body should be charged with the duty of looking at Nigeria's problems and setting an agenda for religions clerics especially in the area of accountability in the hereafter.

(iv) Nation wide campaign should be stepped up to discourage the giving of gifts to lure and attract votes from people during national elections. This will reduce the temptation of embezzlement in other to settle debts incurred before elections by political office holders.

(v) Religious bodies should be involved in the screening of political office holders in other to verify their honesty and attest to their trustworthiness.

(vi) The government should engage religious clerics in preaching to the public through the electronic media on the evils of corruption. This is because individual's spirit of God consciousness and accountability serve as the best police against crimes, which include political corruption.

### Conclusion

This paper has been able to address the solution to political corruption through the use of religion. It therefore, seeks this solution through intensive and extensive use of educational institutions. It also seeks for the inter-

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37. Y. Quadri (trans), *The Sayings of the Prophet*, Ijebu-Ode: Shebiotimo Publications. 1995, pp. 66-67.



vention of religion in the electoral system of Nigeria. This work defines corruption, gives its causes, costs and benefits.

Furthermore, the work has touched on the religious implications of political corruption and offer suggestions to improve the situation. Summarily, this work concludes that only through the teaching of the concept of accountability and cooperation from all ends can the problem of corruption be reduced drastically. Hence, it advocates education of the public at all given opportunities on their accountability to God. It also advocates for the re-engineering of the electoral process by involving religious clerics so as to serve as a means of not only excluding individuals reputed for corruption but also serving as a deterrent to others. It is hoped that with these steps, corruption will be greatly reduced in Nigeria as it now steps into another dispensation in her democratic history.

#### SUMMARY

Corruption is one of the most notorious enemies of man. It has unfortunately eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. Politicians and public office holders are taking advantage of their opportunistic positions to cheat on others. Several conscious efforts have been put in place to stem the tide of this pandemic but to no avail. Ironically, religion has not been put to optimal use in this direction. This paper, therefore, focuses on the utilization of religion and indeed Islam to reduce this destructive element through the education of the public on the concept of eschatology.

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