

## Ethical Challenges in Public Life In Nigeria

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### Introductory Remarks:

You have asked me to speak on *Ethical Challenges in National Development*. I will slightly modify this topic and speak on *Ethical Challenges in Public Life In Nigeria*. The theme of your Conference is **Restoration of Values for National Development**. There is something nostalgic about this expression and I imagine that perhaps the organisers of this conference had some idea that if only we could restore some particular long-lost values, we would be on our way to national development. But this concept of **restoration** is itself problematic.

In my Apple dictionary, the following words appeared as synonyms to ethics: *morals, morality, values, rights and wrongs, principles, ideals, standards (of behavior), value system, virtues, dictates of conscience*. The same dictionary defines restoration as; *repairing, fixing, mending, white-painting, refurbishment, reconditioning, rehabilitation, rebuilding, reconstruction, overhaul, redevelopment, renovation*.

The problem is, when we talk of restoration of values, are we speaking of going back to some museum where these values have been preserved as artifacts/treasures or are we speaking of these values as having been consigned to some dustbin from where we need to retrieve and dust them up? Or are these values like some eggs that have been fertilized somewhere and now are ready for harvest for a national rebirth? Given the movement of the hands of time and given where we are, the notion of the restoration of values as one way of resolving our nation's problems should never be taken as a given.

All nations endure circles and downturns in their history and Nigeria should learn from history. Yesterday's *Empires* and *Emperors, Kings, Queens* and *Kingdoms* are no more. In some cases, yesterday's Slaves are now Kings, as with the United States and Obama; in other places, some Kings are now slaves, or close to that (the Greeks gave us Democracy but theirs is now endangered). The critical question is how a nation seriously appreciates its conditions, seizes the moment and develops the courage to ride the tide of history when it rises. This is often the work of individuals, institutions or organisations who, motivated by patriotism and altruism, devote time, energy and resources to reading the present, forecasting the future and determining how they can influence outcomes for their country. Greatness does not simply happen to any nation. Ask Lincoln, Mussolini, Churchill, Chaka, Mandela, or Kagame.

What I am saying is that the decision to shape policy and influence outcomes is a serious business and it is an open market of ideas. Your organization is strategic in shaping the manpower development and outcome of our nation and I am glad and hope that by taking on this topic, you are showing your commitment to helping our nation change direction. It is important to appreciate the fact that if you genuinely believe that cultivating values or restoration of values is where our nation's salvation lies, then, the challenge will be for you to create momentum around the issues and to do this in a well planned way. Let me now turn to the issues before us this morning.

I will divide this paper into five parts. First, I will try to take a historical view of Ethics. Secondly, I will ask if there is a common ethic or common set of ethical values for a plural nation like ours. Thirdly, I will examine how ethics can shape the public space. Fourthly, I will look at how ethics affects recruitment to

public life in Nigeria. Fifthly, I will address the issues of the role of Ethics in managing diversity. Finally and by way of conclusion, I will highlight a few areas that I believe we need to pay further attention to.

## 1: A historical overview of Ethics and National Restoration

It is plausible to argue that Ethics is as old as the human person and that, indeed, it is part and parcel of the human DNA. A sense of what is right and wrong has been the major distinguishing factor separating the human being and the supposedly lower species of God's creation. There have been a variation of theoretical conceptions and formulations of Ethics and, indeed, the notion has been the subject of ideological, theological and social contestation spanning over the years. This will not concern us here.

Ethics was for some time formulated as the response to a **divine command**. This meant that ethical behaviour was tied to the relationship between the human person and God. Aristotle, for example, saw Ethics as being tied to Virtue. Hobbes, Kant and Bentham all had various propositions and their views shape our thoughts today. For those moral philosophers who were believers, the source of Ethics was seen as derived from the vertical relationship with God which in turn was meant to oil the horizontal relationship between peoples. Thus, ethics was seen as a divine command, what we have come to refer to as the golden rule: *Do unto others as you would like them to do to you!*

Ethics was therefore preoccupied with pleasing the gods. The myths of the times showed very clearly the fact that if the human person wanted to live a good life, he/she had to be properly attuned to the will of God. If this balance was broken, it clearly and negatively affected the balance of this relationship, usually to their disadvantage. This is why reparations had to be made to make up.

For example, when Sisyphus offended the gods, the gods punished him by making him roll a stone up the mountain. As the legend goes, each time he got near to the top of the hill, the stone was rolled back and he had to start all over again. We see this also in the Biblical story of the Fall of our first parents when they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. We also note the curse of Cain when he killed his brother. On the whole, we see very clearly that at whatever time and phase of human history, Ethics has a divine connotation. Our traditional communities have always told the same stories.

Non-Christian religions for example like **Buddhism, Hinduism** or **Jainism** all developed moral codes that were tied to divine injunctions. In almost all of these religions, the moral codes are framed around the preservation of life, the maintenance of a moral balance and some form of protection to human and community dignity and integrity. While the teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism revolved around the sacredness of life (no killing), no theft, search for truth, contemplation, self control, condemnation of alcohol and drugs, **Jainism** on the other hand preached Non violence (*Ahimsa*), Truth (*Satya*), Celibacy/Detachment. The list goes on, but our intention is to draw attention to the pervasive nature of ethics.

Many young Nigerians will be shocked to know that despite the decay, our nation has actually drawn up some of the most fantastic documents on national development plans. After forty years, it is quite embarrassing for every citizen of this country to note that hardly any progress has been made in achieving the goals of almost all the items listed in General Gowon's **9-Point Development Programme** published in 1970. Where some relative progress has been made from Constitution to Elections and States creation, the tensions are still very much around. To refresh our memories, the Programmes which were to be achieved in six years were listed as follows:

- 1. Reorganization of the Armed Forces.*
- 2. Implementation of the National Development Plan and reconstruction of wartime damage.*
- 3. Eradication of corruption.*
- 4. Creation of more States.*
- 5. Adoption of a new Constitution.*
- 6. Introduction of a new revenue allocation formula.*

7. *Conducting a National census.*

8. *Organization of new genuinely national political parties.*

9: *Organization of elections at state and federal level.*

The greatest tragedy is the fact that ours is a nation with no institutional memory. Since coup gradually became the acceptable means of getting to power, the new regime often extended its hatred or greed that propelled the coup to the public institutions too. So, projects by the overthrown administration were abandoned, public officers who served the previous administration were replaced with cronies and the entire system had to start all over again. The result is that you can tie almost every abandoned project to the regimes and governments that we have had, military and civilians. Since the civilian Presidents and Governors have been largely made up of the cronies of the military and other moneybags, it is not strange that this bad habit has been extended to civilian administrations.

Can you imagine what Ajaokuta could have been like if Nigerian leaders had any sense of continuity and patriotism? Can you imagine what our railway system could have been like if those whom we have been saddled with had the presence of mind to carry on with these projects? Can you imagine what our situation would have been like with the Aviation industry today? Ditto Electricity, Roads, and almost every public service? Sadly, propelled by greed, while our nation continues to lie prostrate, office holders and their cronies have laughed their way to the banks rather than prisons.

The nation has stumbled through many years of false starts. Strange as it may sound, every Head of State or President always came mumbling some kind of plans most of which they themselves sometimes did not understand. General Abacha and Shonekan conceived of **Vision 2010**. The only beneficiaries of that **Vision** are the Northern Emirs who almost immediately started collecting their 5% of Local Government Funds in their domains. President Obasanjo's economic team had some great ideas regarding Railways and Power. But, as we now know, the con men and women ran rings around Yar'adua and today, like everything else, billions of dollars later, we have neither Power nor Railways. The late Yar'adua came with his **8-Point Agenda** which obviously has since been abandoned despite the fact that the President was his Vice. Today, we hear about **Vision 20-20-20** and the Transformation Agenda. The hypocrisy continues because every Minister, every PDP Governor starts his or her speech by reminding us of the pursuit of the transformation agenda of Mr. President.

Each of these visions had ended up in a cloud of doubt. Clearly, policy designs are not the issue. To paraphrase Bill Clinton, the simple statement about our situation is to simply say: *It is the corruption, stupid!* But let us turn our attention to the issue of what kind of ethic we can develop to manage a plural society such as ours.

## 2: Is there a Common Ethic for Nigeria?

Given the above scenario, how might we construct a common Ethic within the plurality of our society that is Nigeria? Is pluralism necessarily an obstacle or a challenge to building a common ethic? Is there what we might call a distinction in Ethics based on say, ethnic differences? In other words, might we postulate that there is a difference between Tiv and Idoma ethics, Urhobo and Ijaw ethics, or Fulani and Birom ethics? Can we therefore speak of plurality of ethics, in which case, we might argue that there are about 400 groups of ethical viewpoints in Nigeria? Might we also say that there is a Traditional, Muslim

or Christian ethic? Clearly, this would be a trivialization of the issue given that a sense of what is right and what is wrong cannot have barriers of the type we are referring to. However, a nation with a plurality of identities must find an overarching platform to more or less subordinate, control, accommodate or manage pluralism. This will enable everyone to bring something to the table for the common good. But, in Nigeria, even the most basic things are a challenge.

The Nigerian public space is muddy, murky and in a state of decay both from the view of infrastructure and human and state morals. Our condition has been and remains the subject of many cruel jokes even among ourselves. The jokes have intensified with the coming of Comedy as an employer of labour in Nigeria. The more the money has tumbled in, the uglier the images of Nigeria have become. Today, Nigerian Comedians, make up, borrow or steal jokes, scenarios and stories from other climes. On the surface, there is nothing wrong with this. But, in Nigerian comedy, those nights of a thousand laughs, have you ever heard a Nigerian comedian crack a joke in which a Nigerian is a hero or heroine? Have you ever watched a Nollywood film in which a Nigerian has emerged as a hero or heroine and the country is presented in a way and manner that makes you anxious to visit or do business in?

The first temptation is to argue that it is not the business of individuals, the media or Nollywood to advertise for Nigeria. After all the Federal and State Governments have 101 Ministers and Commissioners of Information, Culture, Trade and Commerce, so what is our business? This is a mark of the failure of our patriotism, but we shall return to this later on. However, it is sad that despite the huge impact that Nollywood has made in Africa and beyond, most foreigners, in Kigali or New York, on meeting a Nigerian ask whether they have brought some juju along with them. Nollywood shows that all we have in Nigeria is blood, poison, murders, robberies and witchcraft. This is the view of our public ethics and morality both within and outside the country.

It is important to note that we are all the product of the kind of environment we grow up in. The epic film, *Trading Places*, tries to resolve the question of how our ethical choices are shaped by the environment around which we grow. It is a story of two men from diametrical backgrounds who suddenly change social backgrounds. One is a beggar who is taken off the street and made a stockbroker. The other is a Wall Street stockbroker (master of the universe) who suddenly loses his fortunes and is thrown to the streets. The question is to see whether both will reproduce the social habits of their environment and of course, that is what happens.

It is therefore plausible to argue that we are all the products of our environment. That is why, Nigerian professionals must face the challenge of cleaning up the environment in which business is done and I mean this right across the board. None of us can pursue our careers if the environment is murky and there are no clear ethical standards. The teacher in a Nigerian university or school, his or her student, the Banker, the politician, the imam, the priest, and so on, will all be victims and unable to perform and achieve our optimal levels if there are no binding ethical standards. I will return to this.

### **3: How should Ethics shape our Public Space?**

First, there is the tendency to believe that Nigeria has no public code of ethics that binds its populace. Yet, this is not true because, like other countries in the world, we all believed that having a Constitution, sets of laws and rules, Codes of ethics to guide various professions and the bureaucracy, was a *conditio sine qua non* for national growth. We inherited all these from the British. After all, the reason why the British came here, according to their gospel, was to civilise us. They said they were on a *civilizing mission* to a dark continent. They believe, and I do too, that they left us a light. What happened to us?

At independence, Nigeria had a crop of civil servants that any nation could have been proud of as I will show below. However, military intervention and the baggage of corruption that came along with it, destroyed the civil service completely. In 1976, Murtala thought he could solve the problem by shaking the civil service from top to bottom. He did, but ended up with a disillusioned and disoriented civil service. Things began to go down as every military government had their own ideas about how to run the civil service. The rules of engagement changed and since the military itself worked on the philosophy of the rule of men rather than the rule of law, the civil service soon fell victim and the rut set in.

For example, the **Office of the Head of Service** both at the Federal and State levels oversees the discipline and promotion of public officials. Chapter 4 of the Civil Service Hand Book, titled, *Code of Ethics in Government Business*, lists *Discipline, Loyalty, Honesty, Courage, Tact, Industry* among many other attributes associated with public service. The moral exhortations contained there are hardly a guarantee of performance. Although civil servants are supposed to be examined before promotions, it is evident that in many instances, god-fatherism and croynism decide the future for many a public servant.

We have enough mechanisms for control on paper, but sadly, the civil service has suffered from the same disease that has afflicted the nation. Imbuing civil servants with a deep sense of patriotism, value of hard work and integrity, adequate remuneration, discipline, a more efficient and transparent system of recruitment and promotion could go a long way to change public cynicism about the public service.

The **Code of Conduct Bureau** for example is saddled with the duty of monitoring the ethical conduct of our public officers. All we the ordinary people seem to know about this office is the declaration of assets (apparently, we say nothing of the accumulation of assets before getting to the office). However, a second conceptual difficulty arises from the fact that this declaration of assets is at best a hollow ritual because no one seriously believes that the Chairman of the Code of Conduct Bureau can summon a President, Governor or Minister to answer for some discrepancies in their submissions. Plus, we do not have any records of any public officer ever going back to declare their new assets!

The only ex President, ex Governor or Minister who can hope to make a ceremonial appearance at the Code of Conduct Bureau would have to be the one that is either out of power, dead or in a party that causes too much *wahala* for the Party in power. Is there anyone today who is serving a prison term as a result of a default on his or her declaration of assets after public service?

What we say of the Code of Conduct Bureau is that, at best, it is like a codicil, a benign appendix. Almost the same can be said of such existing institutions meant to regulate the public ethical conduct of officials such as the *Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)*, *Nigeria Police Force (NPF)*, *Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Crimes Commission (ICPC)*, *Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)*. The Courts, of course, have been a major stumbling block even when these Agencies have tried to deal with issues of corruption. This is part of the tragedy of our national narrative as far as public conduct and malfeasance by public officials is concerned.

All in all, it is true to argue that these institutions are largely subordinated to the powers that have brought them to being and they are also beholden to those who have the right to hire and fire, namely, the President. To that extent, they may be full of good men and women but their capacity to bite, to compel good behaviour and repel corruption, is severely constrained by a web of institutional intrigues, bureaucratic decay and politics.

There should be a public ethic that requires us not to put public officials under undue pressure by the demands we make of them whether as friends, family or communities. We have come to see appointment to public office as our *own chance to chop*. The politics of *it is our turn to eat* manifests itself even in the falsehoods bandied in newspaper advertisements and so on. We need a public ethic that derives from a programme of training within the family, schools, religious establishments and other relevant institutions of learning, over the what public service is and what we should expect from public servants. We have come to expect so little from public servants because we are the ones putting the pressure on them.

#### **4: Ethics and recruitment to Public Life in Nigeria**

Next is the question of the nature and character of recruitment to public life in Nigeria. How do people fill up the positions in the civil service, the military, the security agencies and other spheres of public life? Ordinarily, one would argue that recruitment to public service in Nigeria should be based on citizenship. Sadly, over the years, from colonial times till date, recruitment to the public service has become a cultic exercise with its own code of ethics, akin to what the mafia would refer to as *la cosa nostra*. The cumulative impact of all this is a debilitating system that suffers a cancerous terminal institutional decay as we see with public service in Nigeria today.

The nature of the colonial state, its colonial ideology, sought to create the requisite infrastructure to address the laudable goal of national development. To that extent, we know that the British excelled. Everywhere in the postcolonial world, it is the quality of the British bureaucracy that has come to define how much a country progresses or stagnates. The decay in Nigeria's public life lies squarely with the Nigerian bureaucracy and how that institution gradually became a cesspool of corruption and rut. Today, from Ghana, India or South Africa, the bureaucracy more than any other institution has served as the fulcrum for stability and growth.

This is not the place for us to enter into the debate about what happened and how it happened and why Nigeria is where it is with these battles. However, if truth be told, we know that the quality and caliber of the bureaucratic elite that saw Nigeria into independence could have rivaled its colleagues anywhere in the world, from Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia to India. We had the men and the women who, even if they did not possess University degrees, more than compensated for that by love of country, personal integrity and dedication. People who had a common vision about a society that they were proud of led them and they followed with dedication. A good name was more to them than anything else and pride lay in just having a chance to serve. Service was a Trust not to be broken.

Elsewhere, in countries like Britain and Japan, life in the public service was considered one of the most honourable areas of engagement. Sadly, the military overturned the concept of public service through a combination of disruptive policies which weakened the civil service itself and their greedy manipulation of the public service for self-enrichment. Two examples will illustrate this. In 1976, Murtala's decision to sack thousands of civil servants destroyed the moral foundation of the public service. General Babangida's reforms between 1985 and 1988 opened a Pandora's box. The reforms found effect in Decree 43 and subsequently opened the service to arbitrariness and cronyism. Time tested procedures were set aside, all commens and political cronies were **promoted into the system. The result was that civil servants became largely partners in the corruption of the military**

General Gowon came to power with absolutely no experience of public life. He literally cut his teeth on the fires of a bitter civil war. Today, his role and place is still a source of envy in our history. It had nothing to do with the quality of Generals who surrounded him. It had everything to do with the quality of men and women who ran our public institutions especially the bureaucracy, that central hub of government. The commitment, dedication and patriotic instincts that drove these honest men and women, ensured that their superiors valued their contributions.

Their near total lack of any inkling of greed, self interest and self-preservation meant that their words were their honour. They were not perfect. The quality of policy advice they gave was not a sheath covering the swords and daggers of their ethnic, religious and regional chauvinism as we have today. Thus, despite debates, their superiors often bowed to the superiority of their recommendations and suggestions. Thus, gallant men and women of sterling character such as *Allison Ayida, Ahmed Joda, Ahmed Damcida, Philip Asiodu, Simeon Adebayo, Adamu Fika, Liman and Adamu Ciroma, Elizabeth Pam, Francesca Emmanuel, Ahmed Talib, Yahaya Gusau, Jerome Udoji*, to mention a few, provided both the compass and other navigational aids that saw General Gowon pilot the ship of state through the troubled, shark infested waters of war. Thus, what General Gowon lacked in experience was ably and amply made up for by the qualities of these men and women

Today, President Goodluck Jonathan has better claims to experience and education than General Gowon had in his time. He has a Doctorate degree. He was a senior public servant, a Deputy Governor, Governor, Vice President and Acting President. However, to blame him for being clueless and responsible for the woes of our nation is the easy part. The difficult part is to ask what has happened to the quality of public servants that surround him today. How many of them can look at the President in the face and tell him that a particular policy decision is wrong or ill timed? How many senior civil servants today can look at a Minister in the face and say, this is not good for Nigeria and I will not be part of it? How many public officers today in the civil service can look at a President, Minister, Governor, Director, Chairman and tell him or her to their face that this expenditure cannot be authorized or that there is a conflict of interests here or there? Rather, what we have are senior civil servants showing public officers where the juice is, how to stall contract payments till October is over so we can share the loot. Rather, what we have today are bureaucrats whose central question and overriding philosophy is, *Oga, na you go*

*chop alone or where my own?* President Jonathan does not run the Nigerian bureaucracy. He does not run the various arms of government. He does not run the Ministries and so on.

Do not get me wrong and assume that I am protecting the President. Indeed, you could overturn my argument by saying that it is the President who has chosen his team. However, even within this team, the bureaucracy is what drives the policies enunciated by the Government. A situation where a Minister can only hope for co-operation from his Permanent Secretary and Directors on grounds of which mosque or church they worship in or whether this policy will jeopardize the so called interests of their ethnic group, Zone or Region is poisonous. But, so much is wrong with how public officers are recruited especially with the Party in power behaving as though public office is the sharing of a carcass. The President's body language is important here. His willingness to take full responsibility, to show and lead by example, to take his mind and ambition away from the next election, all these are the issues that determine the level of courage exhibited. When certain Ministers perceive that their lucrative offices are a glorified private treasury and a dispenser of filthy lucre, pride and arrogance are the ethics that are valued and these replace public decorum and humility.

## **5: Ethics and the Management of Diversity**

The next issue is, how prepared are we to create an ethical basis to manage diversity in Nigeria? In 2004, as a student at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, something happened that gave me a jolt in class one day. The Psychology Professor had informed us that we were going to have someone come to speak to us on how to manage diversity in the work place. It all sounded very interesting especially for the United States where the focus is often on black people and women.

He said the speaker was the **Diversity Manager** at the World Bank. I was curious and ensured I did not miss the chance to listen to him or her. When the said lecturer turned up, of course, she was a Nigerian, a certain Dr Julie Oyegun. The idea of a Diversity Manager in the World Bank for me was of great interest. Her business in the Bank, she told us, included among other things, ensuring a balance in the management of the divergent and conflicting backgrounds, cultures, national identities and skills of individuals in the Bank. The idea was that since the Bank was a bank serving the world and owned by it, it was necessary to ensure that various cultures, histories and identities of the world find their way into the Bank and are properly harmonized. At a side conversation, she told me that part of the disadvantage that Nigeria had in the Bank lay in the fact that our people are not adventurous in studying other languages such as Japanese, Chinese and so on. Proficiency in any of these languages, according to her, would be an advantage since it is a Bank of the entire world and citizens can work anywhere!

I wondered to myself, what would Nigeria be like if we had a Diversity Manager? To be sure, we have General Abacha to thank for setting up the Federal Character Commission, one out of the many great things that the man did. We also appreciate the fact that Consultants undertake recruitment to Federal institutions and the on paper, the Federal Government has tried to ensure that all recruitments to public service are no long a cultic affair open only to the big tribal hegemons. However, stories abound to the effect that more often than not, these Consultants have their hands tied by those in power and that often jobs are already given up and the interviews are a mere formality to fulfill dubious righteousness.

It is clear that for us in Nigeria, parochial interests have overturned our sense of national unity. Today, we are running a semi feudal system. A political elite, unable or unwilling to reach the people directly, has resorted to governing in the same indirect rule system that the British left behind for us. Constitutional institutions are subordinated to feudal structures of patronage where sustaining these institutions is equated with sustaining the communities. The result now is that we have a situation where huge resources are being sunk daily into the dubious ceremonies of the crowning of emergency princes and warriors who, by feathering the tribal nests have subordinated national interests to those of their feudal patrons.

One obviously comes under intense pressure in a society where the measure of a public servant and his or her success lies in how many people he or she recruited from his or her clan, town or faith. It would be a matter of public reproach for a public servant who is in the Debt Management Office to say that he or she secured debt for Nigeria, that a Minister of Finance negotiated some favourable terms for Nigeria, or

that the Minister for Trade brought foreign investment to Nigeria. You would be laughed at publicly if, even as a Law maker, you expect your community to praise you for sponsoring a bill to help end maternal or infant mortality or a bill that helped to fund a research programme that took Nigeria to space. No. The Senate President or the Speaker are not expected to pride themselves in the quality of law making that they have embarked on to change our nation. No, their people measure their success by what they have done for them locally.

Rather than setting high standards for public life and rallying our people to a common cause, public officials are turning their offices into extensions of their community or faith. This is why no serious government will allow public servants to openly steal or divert state resources to sustain local patronage at the expense of the nation only for the same government to watch these public officers take dubious and meaningless titles. In more serious countries, even within Africa, a good number of these crooks should be in prison not public service. No one behaves in this vile manner anywhere in the world today. This is why our sparkling beads and turbans attract cynical snide remarks from those who watch our scandalous *squandering of riches* as our Onyeka said almost thirty years ago. We cannot go on like this and hope to build a nation. We cannot go on like this and expect anyone to respect us. We cannot go on like this and expect to be given a seat at the table of honour. We cannot go on like this and expect to end violence. We cannot go on like this and hope to organize free and fair elections. We cannot go on like this and hope to build a democracy. No. The corrosive effect of corruption defeats any hope of development. By way of conclusion, how can we ensure a place for ethics in our public life? I will address this by making some a few suggestions.

## **6: Summary and Conclusion:**

I have already noted that a sense of ethics, a sense of what is right or wrong, is part of our human DNA. I have also tried to show that our ethnic and religious differences are not an obstacle to our having a common ethic. Although we have a Constitution and Codes of ethics for public life, it is clear that they have been lived more by breach than observation. We cannot go on like this. I therefore believe that we need to thank your organization for thinking about this issue and I personally do hope that you will take these issues beyond this Conference. You occupy a very strategic position in our national life since you are involved in recruiting manpower for the public and the private sectors. To that extent, the quality of those who will run our country and its affairs are all in your hands and within your grasp. I hope that you will consider your duty very carefully and appreciate the fact that it is on you that raising a future generation which will change Nigeria depends. It starts one person at a time and if you let too many crooks and criminals into the system due to pressure and other considerations, our country will only get progressively worse. Let me leave you with the following thoughts.

**First**, it is easy to see a correlation between Ethics and religion. But, as we know, despite being visibly religious, our ethical bars are set rather low. Nigerians have not been able to draw the line between stealing public funds and their faith. Indeed, we show this by the number of churches and mosques that are built with stolen loot, as if to compensate and appease God. My friend, Adamu Adamu has dealt with this issue trenchantly and demonstrated that indeed, we are in trouble in Nigeria over the whole question of what has become of religion and how hajj operations have become a source of corruption and waste. According to him, Nigerian Muslims spent over N106b for the lesser hajj alone this year. He questioned the dilemma thus: *With famine ravaging the Sabel and the Horn of Africa, it is criminal to contemplate going on Umrah with funds that can save lives--yes, and they are Muslim lives too, even though Islam has not asked you to discriminate between grieving souls. Yes, these Northern Umrah-going Muslims are waiting for Catholic Caritas, Christian Aid and Save the Children to come and save their children.*

The Christian pilgrimage also poses its own problems with stories of a few billion having been spent. Senior government officials, their families, cronies and many others who are sponsored by federal and state governments often undertake these pilgrimages. Both the operators and the governments have come to believe that somehow, it is the business of government to make citizens holy. Together with *Pilgrimages, Prayer Warriors, Chapels and Chaplaincies* are now part of our national life. Yet, as we see, not much is happening in terms of the quality of our ethical lives. I am almost certain that no other country in the

world inflates the Saudi Arabian country the way that Nigeria does. Absolutely none. And, almost 90% of all this is government money meant to develop our people so they can at least taste the heaven here on earth. But no, Nigerian leaders would rather that their people live in hell here and sleep walk their way to paradise. Yet, despite all this, what they did to our pilgrims this year is just the beginning of our humiliation. We have been warned by the Saudis that we should at least come to Hajj once in five years, but Nigerian public servants will have none of that. Yet, once out of office, the same pilgrims suddenly develop hajj fatigue. What happened to our pilgrims this year, is what the Hausas call, *kore da hali*. But shall we ever learn?

**Second**, there is the need for us to subordinate ourselves under our Constitution and take more seriously its provisions. To this end, we must appreciate the urgency of cleaning up the Judiciary and the various law enforcement agencies so as to create a culture built on the ethics of work. There has been a profusion of Agencies ostensibly to deal with issues of ethics in public life but the results are not much. These organs have been bureaucratized and there are too many agencies trying to do the same things. There are struggles for budget allocations and there is very little coordination of activities and sharing of information and common plan of action.

**Third**, Organisations, the Corporate world and Associations are all governed by codes of Ethics. However, many organisations within the private sector tend to focus on protecting their territories and professional interests rather than the common good. Often, when members commit professional crimes, they are shielded from the public eye because organisations want to protect their identities and integrity. Corporate ethics must have an impact on the larger society through the way organisations discipline the wayward and the fraudulent in their organisations. Corporate integrity can and should rub off on the larger society. When the markets/banks fall as a result of greed, when buildings collapse and kill people, when Doctors, religious leaders and so on, abuse trust they deserve to be punished.

**Fourth**, there is the problem of bad politics. The political class in Nigeria has become fraudulent largely because too many men and women with questionable credentials have invaded that field. Today, we hear that the Minister of Information is traveling around with Journalists and members of civil society to SEE projects being executed by federal and state governments. This publicity stunt has implications for public ethics. For example, we are occasionally being shown abandoned projects but who abandoned them? Ghosts? If what the government wants to achieve is evidence of accountability, then, we need to be told those who got the contracts and why they were abandoned. Otherwise, we all know that in 1999, Professor Jerry Gana conducted a similar tour and some of the projects we saw are the same ones that were abandoned yesterday. Who says that today's projects will not be abandoned tomorrow after the Governor and the Minister have been replaced?

The political class in Nigeria suffers some really serious integrity deficit. We are hopefully on an irreversible path to democracy, but the political class must not take this for granted. A situation where their preoccupation remains self-enrichment is not good for the integrity of politics and it will keep our country stymied and violent for a long time.

**Fifth**, there is the persistence of corruption. We often see corruption as stealing of money. In reality, what we should be worried about is what these monies are being used for. I suggest that all public officers should not be allowed to take and answer traditional titles in Nigeria. Even if they had the title before their appointment, they should drop those titles. When a public official is known as the Chief Warrior of his tribe, what can one expect? He is being given a license to come and declare war on the resources of the Nigerian state on behalf of his people. His loyalty is not to the President or Governor, but to the Chief who has given him the title. His loyalty is not to Nigeria, but to the community to which he belongs. We end up with divided loyalty and conflict of interests. Why is it that these favourite sons and daughters are only recognized when they get a public appointment?

Taken together with this is the need to monitor the expenditure of public officials during funerals, weddings, chieftaincies, house-warmings and so on. Clearly, these extravagant lifestyles can only be sustained by easy money. If these people were *Medical Doctors, Lawyers, Architects, Accountants*, working day and night, they would not throw such money to these useless escapades as it happens among us. Extravagance is tied to free money that comes from politics since the state is the only domain of power,

privilege and filthy lucre. When out of power or when their patrons are no longer in office, their children's weddings, parents' funerals deteriorate to community whispers.

A worrying trend that has emerged in Nigeria is the total neglect of the discipline enshrined in the concept of what is called, **conflict of interests**. Conflict of interests arises when a public official, President, Governor, Minister, Commissioner or Local Government Official, Principal or Bishop allows their private interests or office to confer undue advantage on them in the running of affairs. Despite the fact that conflicts of interests destroys public confidence in any system, it has become part and parcel of national life in Nigeria's public service.

Even while in public service, it is not uncommon to find very senior public officials and their families building Hotels, Schools and Universities clearly with public funds arising from abuse of their positions. People in power are openly bidding for contracts through proxies or directly and using their leverage, power and position to tilt the balance of negotiation in their favour or the dummy companies created by their proxies. They are supposed to double as business men while in power. This is indeed a disgrace and it is the clearest evidence of what separates us from other nations. It is the reason why Nigeria is trapped in the twilight zone of underdevelopment. These Companies owned by *government people* will win these contracts and jobs will not be executed. Ask who else in the world has the kind of national litter that spreads across our nation as abandoned projects today? In the end, it is a case of what the Hausas say; *Dokin sarki ya ci dawan sarki* (*The king's horse has eaten the king's corn*). Where are our public interest lawyers?

Finally, you know, we humans are very proud and we are convinced that we are the apex of God's creatures. Don't we all feel insulted at being called, a monkey? Well, let me leave you with a conversation that took place between three monkeys when it was rumoured that they are descended from us humans. The conversation went thus: *Now listen you two, there is a certain rumour that can't be true. There are allegations that humans descended from our noble race. Surely, that can't be true. The very idea itself is shocking and a disgrace. For example: No monkey ever deserted his wife, starved her babies or ruined her life. You have never known another monkey leave her babies with another monkey for a bunk, or pass them one to the other till they scarcely know who is the mother. Another thing you will never see among us monkeys is another monkey building a fence around a coconut tree and let that coconut tree go to waste, forbidding any other animal to taste. Why, if I put a fence around a tree, starvation would force you to steal from me, and that is not right.....Another thing a monkey would not do, go out at night disgracing his life by drinking and then reel madly home and beat up his wife. They (humans) call this pleasure and they make a big fuss that they have descended from something.....but certainly not from us.*

Thank you for your kind attention and God bless you all.