

Addressing Moral Decadence among Nigerian Youths through the Inspirational Biography of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

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Abstract

Youths are energetic members in any human society. They exude extraordinary potentials required for the growth and development of the society. However, there is a tendency for them to abuse these opportunities that come with their potentials. This is largely due to immoral acts they engage in such as alcoholism, drug abuse, cybercrime, etc. In the recent time, most Nigerian youths have been exposed to those immoral acts which have reduced them to an existential liability, as against being a potential asset, to the nation. The government has made several efforts at making the youth responsible members of the society in view of their potential qualities to be the leaders of tomorrow. However, all efforts seem to be in futility. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the biography of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as a veritable tool to address moral decadence among the youths. The idea is to highlight some moral values which the Prophet (SAW) exhibited as a youth while growing up in Makkah where he was nick-named al-Amin (i.e., the trustworthy) even before his Prophethood. The paper is based on a biographical work written by Fethullah Gulen due to the moralistic approach employed by the author in documenting events in the life of the Prophet (SAW). To achieve this objective, historical and analytical methods are used. It concludes by recommending that biographers of the Prophet (SAW) should highlight moral qualities in his life to project him as a role model for the youths.

Keywords: Biography of the Prophet, Moral Decadence, Youth, Prophetic guidelines

Introduction

Youth is an essential phase in man's life. It is the period of unlimited strength and incredible ambitions. The youths also enjoy extraordinary latent talents embedded in them. If these talents are properly harnessed, youths can play a major role in the overall development of any given society. However, there are tendencies for youths to abuse the abundant strength and leisure at their disposal. They are susceptible to moral corruption which could impede their potentials and aspirations to build the nation. Thus, they can constitute a danger and threat to society. This is the unfortunate reality among the youths in contemporary society. Their involvement in social menaces such as drug abuse, cultism, rape, and other moral ills have rendered them ill-prepared for leadership positions as they are bereft of sense of responsibility. This is despite many policies and programs which the government at state and federal levels, has introduced to address the youths' challenges, such as the National Youths Service Corp (NYSC) and the Ministry of Youths and Sports. Perhaps, these policies and programs have failed to address the many challenges facing the youths because they are targeted at their economic or social wellbeing at the expense of moral wellbeing which is the required foundation for them to be economically and socially responsible.

Against this background, this paper intends to explore the biography of the Prophet (SAW) with a view to drawing inspirations there from to solve multi-faceted youth problems in the contemporary time, with special reference to Nigeria. History has adjudged the Prophet (SAW) to be a perfect role model as a child, a youth, a trader, a family man, a friend, and a leader. For this paper, his life as a youth shall be highlighted

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to draw lessons there from. In addition, his guidelines for the youths shall also be articulated for the enlightenment purpose. To achieve this, the book: *Muhammad: The Messenger of God*, by Fethullah Gulan shall be used as a primary source in addition to other major biographical works on the personality of the Prophet (SAW).

The approach of this paper is moralistic which was obviously adopted by Fethullah Gulan. This is a departure from a traditional historic approach which is common in most biographical works on the Prophet (SAW). With this moralistic approach, less emphasis is laid on dates of major events in his life. Rather, moral lessons at every stage of his prophetic life are highlighted for the benefit of the youths and the human society at large.

It should be mentioned here that Fethullah Gulan is a contemporary Turkish scholar. Born in Erurum in eastern Turkey in 1941, he is an Islamic scholar and thinker, and a prolific writer and poet. Based in the United States on self-exile, he inspired the socio-religious movement called Gulan movement with impacts across the globe. His magnum opus is *Muhammad: The Messenger of God*, which is the major reference point of this work.

Youths and their Significance in the Society

The term “youth” is “the time of life when one is young” or “the period of existence, growth, or development” (Merriam-Webster). The age range that constitutes youth varies from one society to another because an individual’s actual maturity may not correspond to his chronological age. However, the UNESCO has defined a youth as a person between the ages of 15 and 24 (www.unesco.org.) In the Nigerian context, the Nigerian National Youth Policy 2001: 2 defines youth as comprising all young persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years and who are the citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

In Islam, it is generally believed that the period of youth ends at upper limit of 40 years. With a few exceptions, many prophets were appointed when they were forty years of age (Oloyede 665). The following Qur’anic verse is instructive in this regard:

And We have enjoined on man doing of good to his parents; with trouble did his mother bear him and with trouble did she bring him forth; and the bearing of him and the weaning of him was thirty months, till when he attains his maturity and reaches forty years, he says: My Lord, grant me that I may give thanks for your favor which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do good which pleases You and do good to me in respect of my offspring; surely I turn to You, and surely I am of those who submit. (Q 46: 15)

The period of youth engenders hope and aspirations given its innumerable features such as vigour, strength, and dynamism. These qualities could be used as weapons of mass destruction just as they could be used to develop the society. This is why youths are considered as the most important ingredient of development if their mesmerizing skills and qualities are positively employed. The youths constitute the largest percentage of the population in any human society. And if given correct orientation and adequate opportunities they can play a major role in the nation building. However, often, youths are always faced with various challenges bordering on immorality and crimes.

The youth population is one of the most important strengths of the Organization of Islamic Corporation (OIC) member countries and according to the current population projections, it will remain a major strength over the coming decades. It is projected that one-third of young population worldwide will be living in OIC countries in 2050. While this offers a great opportunity for those OIC countries, it also makes them face critical challenges in utilizing this great potential. Providing quality education and training, generating adequate number of jobs and easing transition from education to labour market, creating equal

opportunities in skill formation and job market for both male and female, promoting inter-generational social mobility for better standards of living, ensuring active participation of youth in the society, and reducing addictions of young people to harmful substances and behaviours are all examples of the challenges of effectively utilizing the crucial potential of the young population in OIC countries (<http://www.sesric.org/files/article/507.pdf>.)

No doubt, the vigorous role of the youths in the political development of nations vividly manifested in the Arab Springs which swept major Arab nations like Egypt, Tunisia, and later Libya in the recent time. In each of these countries, the youths staged a well-coordinated revolution and saw to the change of regimes. This ensured the deposition of Hosni Mubarak, Ben Asis, and the killing of Muhammer Ghaddafi. Though, these leaders were removed from power, but whether the objective of revolution has thus been achieved is a topic for another day.

Likewise, in Nigeria, the youths constitute the largest percentage of the total population. They are very agile, articulate, and ready to make meaningful contributions to the nation building. In fact, some of them have made the country proud in different human endeavours. An example is General Yakubu Gowon who served as the Nigeria Head of State at the age of 31. In the field of education, the Nigerian literary giants, namely Chinua Achebe (<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/chinua-achebe>) and Wole Soyinka (<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1986/soyinka/biographical/>) produced their numerous world acclaimed literary works at 25 and 28 respectively.

However, in the contemporary time, the youth population has now constituted a threat to the national economy, security, and religious harmony. This ugly trend is a result of a combination of factors, namely, failure on the part of the parents to nurture and train their wards, societal failure in influencing the young ones positively, and indeed the colossal failure on the part of the Government to provide job opportunities for the youths to develop and utilize their skills for the development of the nation.

Moral Decadence among the Youths in Nigeria and the Government Interventions

Consequent upon the combined failure on the part of the parent, society and the government, the youths have been exposed to various immoral activities, namely cultism, drug abuse, alcoholism, rape, and other crimes. Almost on daily basis, the society is inundated with crime news involving the teenagers. This moral decadence among the youths, has socio-political, economic, religious and health implications on the society in general.

Socially speaking, the society is endangered due to nefarious unethical activities of the youth. Most tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been turned into as a bastion of cultism and hooliganism. This bad tendency has had a negative effect on the security of the campuses as well as of the larger society. In addition to this, many promising young minds have been murdered in a cold blood whether innocently or otherwise. Thus, future leaders have their lives terminated at the tender age, thereby depriving the nation of fine scientists, articulate lawyers, competent engineers, and indeed able scholars.

Politically speaking, unscrupulous politicians have also made the condition of these vulnerable youths worse. They have been engaging the services of cult members to use them to eliminate their political enemies. At every election, reports of murder, kidnapping, and arson are common on the dailies, Television and Radio.

There is no doubt that when the youth go on a rampage, marketplace and legitimate business suffer a major setback. The most unfortunate unethical activity of the Nigerian youth is pipeline vandalism, which is carried out by disgruntled youths in Niger Delta, an oil-producing region. The vandalization of pipelines

and oil installation is the prominent reason why the country is in the current economic recession. Though, the marginalization of the region is arguably true, nothing can reasonably justify this wanton destruction of natural resources of the nation. This and cultist activities go a long way in crippling economic activities in the society and economic development is thus retarded.

On the religious front, Muslim youths have genuine desire to understand and practice their religion in a correct manner. However, most of them end up being introduced into fanaticism and deviationists' trend. They are therefore brainwashed by fanatic scholars who follow the rigid path in the understanding and practice of Islam. It is now an open secret that these naïve and innocent young people have been recruited into terrorism, a trend that gives Islam bad name and causes security challenges at local and global levels. The problems facing the youth become more worrisome especially in the 21st century thanks to the so-called globalization. The young people are, more than before, now exposed to sophisticated means of immorality with the availability of different social networks like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram among others. They perpetrate different types of Cybercrime for which they are known as Yahoo boys and Yahoo plus. These Yahoo boys have gone ritual as they look for human parts to enhance their chances of swindling the unsuspecting online users.

The moral decadence among the youths is due to a combination of factors which range from family failure to societal and governmental failure. Perhaps due to economic hardship, many parents have abdicated their natural duty of training their children in line with religious teachings and cultural values. Likewise, the society has failed to check the excesses of the youths, unlike what was obtainable before the modern time. And finally, the government seems to allow the youths the maximum freedom in the name of realizing their potentials. As a result of the colossal failures of the family institution, the society, and the government, many youths have settled for the so-called celebrities among musicians and artists as role models and character moulders. Thus, they take from the super stars 'lessons' on hedonism and materialism which make them desperate to amass wealth and live a glamorous life.

Many nations and organizations consider the corrupt young people as a potential clog in the progress of the society. As such, some have put in place different measures and programmes aimed at orientating and engaging the youth population in a positive manner. For instance, Nigeria has set up the National Youth Service Corps NYSC as a platform for the proper orientation of the youth to be responsible and productive members of the society. The scheme was inaugurated in 1978 after the civil war to achieve three Rs, namely Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction. Specifically, the scheme was designed for fresh graduates who are mandated to spend one year in states other than their own. During this programme, they render services to the communities to which they are posted in different capacities. They are also orientated on the need to be patriotic and be their brothers' keepers. But unfortunately, the scheme is largely concerned with socio-economic being of the youths at the expense of their moral wellbeing (Yusuf 101). In fact, immoral practices are rampant in most camps across the federation. No wonder, there are calls from some quarters to scrap the scheme because it has failed to even address socio-economic issues concerning the youths. Hence, the question now is how do we address ethical problems bedevilling the youths?

The Prophet (SAW) as a Role Model for the Youths

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was the last of prophets that Allah sent to the world to teach and preach about His oneness and to reform the society. Before him, there were many prophets and messengers such as Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa. These and all other prophets possessed high moral qualities in addition to their spiritual credentials which made them unique among the entire human race. Though, he was the last to come, Prophet Muhammad was the best among the prophets in terms of creation and character. His message is the most comprehensive and detailed. So, his personality is a perfect role model in all stages of life, as a child, a youth, a husband, a father, a friend, and a leader. If closely studied, his life as a youth

offers the best model for the young people in solving perennial ethical problems associated with youths. He has been described by Allah in the Quran as the best in term of good character in the following concise and precise manner: “And Thou (standest) on an Exalted standard of character” (Al-Qalam:4).

All the Prophets of Allah lived a responsible youth life. Prophet Ibrahim was a committed and devoted teenager. He stood firm when his people wanted him on their side as an idol worshipper. To force him, he was thrown into burning fire. But he was saved by his Lord who commanded the fire to turn cold and peaceful for him. Despite the threat, he never deviated. Also, Prophet Yusuf did not give in to temptation when he was seduced by Zulaykha, a very beautiful queen. Instead, he settled for prison just to protect his dignity and moral quality (Saaeed 20). The moral commitment of both prophets later paid off; while Ibrahim became the patriarch of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Yusuf was made king! The Qur’an also narrates the story of the dwellers of the cave, *Ashab al-Kahf*. They were a group of committed young people who fled their corrupt society and sought shelter in the cave just to preserve their faith.

We relate to Thee their story in truth: They were (youths) who believed in their Lord, and we advanced them in guidance: (Al-Kahf: 13)

More than other prophets, the life of Prophet Muhammad was comprehensively documented by historians and biographers. His life before and after prophethood was adequately chronicled. History has it that, he was born an orphan, having lost his father, Abdullah, while he was in the womb of his mother, Aminah. Her mother too died while he was six years old. As a result of this, the care of the orphan was shouldered by his grandfather, AbdulMuttalib. Consequent upon the death of his caring grandfather, his uncle, Abu Talib assumed the responsibility to take care of his nephew. As an orphan of 10 or 12 years old, the young Muhammad would follow his uncle, Abu Talib on business trips to Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere. In one of such trips, a monk by name Bahirah observed in him extraordinary traits that suggested that he would be called to prophethood soon. The monk gave his uncle a sincere advice to take the young lad back in Makkah for fear of being exposed to the danger of the Jewish community should they see him. His advice goes thus: “Let me give you this advice. If they discover him, they’ll harm him” (Fethullah 5).

The Prophet’s decorum must have been noticed by the monk in addition to spiritual qualities he observed in him. More than ten years after the first encounter, the monk also met the Prophet for the second time. This time around, he was 25 years of age, and had gone on a business trip with the trade caravan of Khadijah, a respected widow he would later marry based on her proposal. Again, the monk observed similar spiritual qualities in him, which were indicative of prophethood. Unlike in the first meeting, the monk told Muhammad the following:

You will be a Prophet, the Last Prophet. I wish that God would allow me to live to see you raised as a Prophet. I would follow you, carry your shoes and protect you against your enemies. (Fethullah 5)

As a youth, the Prophet (SAW) played important roles in the socio-economic, religious, and political developments of his immediate society. Armed with high moral standard, he was an advocate of justice and human rights, a trustworthy and upright person, peacemaker and arbitrator, disciplined and reclusive person.

Advocate of Justice and Human Rights

The environment in which the Prophet lived was fraught by tribal rivalries. Tribes commanded blind loyalty at the expense of justice and equity. Loyalty to the tribe, courage to fight with others to vindicate the honour of the tribe, the glorification of one’s own tribe, absolute equality for all within the tribe and protection of those who sought refuge with the tribe were rated as the main virtues (Hassan 42). This was a

factor responsible for many protracted wars in the Arabia peninsula, the most prominent of which was *Harb al-Basus*.

Despite the immoral tendency of the Arab society, the life of the Prophet was full of social activities in pursuit of justice and human rights and equity. As a teenager, he partook in two major events. The first was the *fijar* (sacrilegious) war which broke between the Quraysh and *Banu Kinana* on one side and *Qais 'Ailan* tribe on the other. It was thus called because the inviolable were made violable, the prohibited months being included (Al-Tawbah:36). In one of those battles, the Prophet (Peace be upon him) joined his uncles but did not raise arms against their opponents. His efforts were confined to picking up the arrows of the enemy as they fell and handing them over to his uncles (al-Mubarakpuri 28).

The second event was *fudoul* confederacy: The story behind this battle is that a man from Zubaid clan came as a merchant to Makkah where he sold some commodities to Al-'As bin Wail As-Sahmy. By hook or by crook, the latter tried to evade paying for the goods. The salesman sought help from different clans in Quraish but they paid no heed to his earnest pleas. He then resorted to a mountain top and began, at the top of his voice, to lament over the injustice that he suffered. By the time, Az-Zubair bin 'Abdul-Muttalib heard of him, he made inquiries into the matter. Consequently, the parties to the aforesaid confederacy convened and ensured that Az-Zubaidy's right was restored from Al-'As bin Wa'il.

Subsequently, people felt the need for forming confederacy in Makkah with the sole purpose of suppressing violence and injustice and vindicating the rights of the weak and the destitute. As a result of this, the representatives of Banu Hashim, Banu Al-Muttalib, Asad bin 'Abd Al-'Uzza, Zahrah bin Kilab and Taim bin Murra were invited into a meeting in the house of a respectable elderly man called 'Abdullah bin Jad'an At-Taimy to enter into a confederacy that would provide for the above-mentioned items. The Messenger of Allâh (Peace be upon him) was actively involved in this peace process. And shortly after he had been assigned as Prophet, he used to recount his experience with this league in very positive words:

I attended the conclusion of an agreement at 'Abdullah bin Jad'an's house. I would not exchange it for the best material gain. If someone appeals to it in Islam, I would respond.
(Fethullah 6)

As a matter of fact, the spirit of this confederacy and the course of deliberations therein marked a complete departure from the pre-Islamic tribal pride. The role played by the young Muhammad in both events portrayed him as an advocate of justice and human rights. Though still at the tender age, he vehemently stood up against injustice and oppression, using his rigor and strength to protect the downtrodden and the oppressed members of the society without fear or favour. Unlike many youths in his time and in the 21st century, he did not use the conflict time to achieve or satisfy material desires like looting and rape which characterize youths at any crisis situation.

Trustworthy and Morally Upright Person

As a youth, and ever before his call to Prophethood, the young Muhammad exhibited a high sense of trustworthiness and moral uprightness in different capacities. For some time, he worked as a manager under Khadijah, a wealthy widow who later became his wife following her proposal. He carried out his duty diligently and sincerely. Even Maisarah, Khadijah's housemaid, was amazed at the Prophet's managerial skill and sense of trustworthiness. The good character and unprecedented profits made by the young Muhammad from various business trips endeared him to his employer, Khadijah so much that she had to propose to him to be her husband. In doing this, Khadijah was undeterred by the inferior social status of the young Muhammad neither was she discouraged by the age difference; at that time Khadijah was forty years old, while the prophet was twenty-five years old. The union was blessed with six children, four females and

two males.

It is noteworthy that, the young Muhammad was not infected with youthful exuberance before Khadijah made the proposal. Not many youths would record a clean sheet in such a situation. A typical youth with such an opportunity would most likely be tempted to make some nasty move at enticing a young lady like Maisarah or a wealthy and gorgeous businesswoman like Khadijah! Only a few young lads would escape the temptation of woman and money. However, the Prophet was divinely guided and came out clean and pure.

In the same vein, the good character of the young Muhammad was not only recognized by Khadijah and Maisarah. Rather, he was also acknowledged by people in his immediate environment as a paragon of trustworthiness and truthfulness. Given his other exalted and laudable characteristics, everyone recognized him as a young man who never lied, cheated, broke his word, or participated in pagan rituals. Hence, he was nick-named as al-Amin, “the Truthful, Trustworthy Man” even by his bitterest enemies. The following remark represents the public perception of his character:

If you have to travel and need someone to look after your wife, entrust her to Muhammad without hesitation, for he will not even glance at her face. If you want to entrust your wealth for safe-guarding, entrust it to this trustworthy, honest man, for he will never touch it. If you look for someone who never tells a lie and never breaks his word, go directly to Muhammad, because whatever he says is true. (Fethullah 6)

Peacemaker/Arbitrator

Expectedly, the popularity of young Muhammad fetched him some respect in the Makkian society. He was admired and respected by both young and old, man and woman. His reputation eventually qualified him to play a crucial role as a peacemaker and an arbiter to douse the tension of an imminent war that could consume Makkah as a whole. When the Ka’bah was rebuilt by the Quraysh, there was a disagreement among various clans of the Quraysh as regards who should have the honour of fixing the Black Stone in its right place. The dispute became serious as it threatened the unity of the Quraysh. During the meeting that was characterized with hot debates on the issue, they reached a compromise unanimously that the first person to enter would be given the singular honour of placing the Black Stone in its rightful position. By divine design, the young Muhammad entered the venue of the meeting, and was unanimously chosen to be the arbitrator. Thus, Muhammad settled the dispute to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. He placed the Black Stone on a sheet of cloth, and requested the representatives of all the tribes to carry the sheet to the place where the stone was to be affixed. On getting there, Muhammad lifted the stone and fixed it at the proper place (Hasan 50). Thus, the peace was restored through the diplomatic approach of the most peaceful man ever created by the Supreme Being!

Disciplined and Reclusive

The society in which the young Muhammad lived was riddled with idol worshipping. His people were pagans, heathens, and polytheists. They worshipped many gods and goddesses. Every tribe had its own god. The Ka’bah had been turned to a sanctuary housing about 360 idols. Al-Hubal was the chief of these deities. Al-Lat, al-Uzzah and al-Manat were female deities and were referred to as the “Daughters of Allah” (Hasan 43). The young Muhammad was ever observant of religious activities in his environment. He was ever surprised at how his people could be worshipping creatures instead of the Supreme Creator Himself. Though he was not yet a prophet at that time, he was not comfortable with the religious statuesque as it did not appeal to his instinct. As such, he adopted a reclusive lifestyle; he would go to the cave of Hira for the purpose of reflection over the universe and all marvellous creatures around him. He was convinced that these beautiful things could not have been created by what his people were worshipping and adoring. Also, he was very sure that this universe could not have been in existence without a purpose.

It was during one of his outings at the cave that the archangel Jibril visited and commissioned him as a prophet. A novel experience, the Prophet was scared and could not understand what was happening. The angel said, "Read". Muhammad answered in awe, "what shall I read? He felt as if the angel had strangled him and then released him. Once more, he heard the command, "Read". Muhammad's reply was, "What shall I read?" Once more, he felt the angel strangling and then releasing him, and he heard him repeat the command, "Read". For the third time, Muhammad answered, "What shall I read?" fearful that this time the strangling would be stronger. The angel replied:

Read in the name of your Lord, the Creator, who created man of a clot of blood. Read! Your Lord is most gracious. It is He who taught man by the pen that which he does not know ('Alaq: 1-5)

Muhammad recited these verses, repeating them after the angel who withdrew after they were permanently carved upon his memory (Haykal 73). Thus, he rushed home to the waiting hand and soothing heart of his wife, Khadijah, who gave him succour and allayed his fear.

It is important to observe that the young Muhammad partook in social activities in his community. He did not stay aloof neither did he stand passive in his society. He joined hand with the like minds to advance justice and promote peace in his society. At the same time, he refrained from joining the bandwagons by avoiding crimes and violence even as an agile young man. Thus, his reclusive lifestyle was only in respect of the religious life of his people which was about idol worshipping. Instead of joining them, he decided to isolate himself by visiting the cave of Hira. This he did to avoid bad influence which could endanger his relationship with the Supreme Creator, to whom he and all owe their existence and sustenance. Eventually, his sense of discipline and uprightness was compensated with an invaluable reward, namely Prophethood.

Prophetic Guidelines for the youths

The life of the Prophet as a youth was not only an exemplary model to follow. He also gave some guidelines for the youths to lead a responsible life. He played a pivotal role in nurturing the young minds by way of counselling and guidance. He succeeded in building an army of youths (his Companions) with a high sense of responsibility and leadership qualities. His guidelines for the youths were valid on moral basis because he had put those guidelines into practice before he preached them. His words and actions do not contradict each other.

As earlier highlighted, youths possess strength and exude hope and ambition. These qualities make them susceptible to moral problems which might eventually dash their hope and aspiration for a brighter future. Added to these is abundant leisure time at their disposal which, very often, renders them idle and potential devil's workshop. Most youths crave after lust and sensual enjoyment. This explains why rape case is rampant among teenagers. Understanding this peculiar problem of the youths, the Prophet gave them pieces of sincere advice to stay morally upright. In his tradition below, he was reported to have exhorted any youth who is able and capable to support a family to get married.

Alqamah, one of the servants Ibn Mas'ud, said: "I was walking in Mina along with Ibn Mas'ud when 'Uthman met him and had a conversation with him. 'Uthman then told him: O Abu 'Abdur-Rahman! Can we marry you to a young woman who will remind you of some of the past days of your life? Ibn Mas'ud replied: As you have said that, the Prophet (SAW) once said: O young men! Whoever is capable of maintaining a wife among you should get married, for marriage lowers the gaze and protects the private parts from fornication and adultery. And whoever is not capable should be observing fast, for it curbs the sexual urge (Bukhari).

In the above tradition, the Prophet prescribed marriage as an antidote to burning sensual desire in the youths. Of course, this is guided by the condition of ability and capability on the part of the youth concerned. Otherwise, in the absence of such a condition, fasting is recommended, for it stems sensual urge and checkmates the burning lust for the promiscuous tendency. Also, it instils self-discipline, which is most needed by every human being, especially the youths.

Furthermore, the Prophet also counselled Ibn 'Abbas on the need to solely depend on Allah and have self-confidence. The tradition goes thus: On the authority of Abu 'Abbas 'Abdullah the son of 'Abbas (RA), who said:

One day I was behind the Prophet (SAW) [riding on the same mount] and he said to me: "Young man, I shall teach you some words [of advice]: Be mindful of Allah, and Allah will protect you. Be mindful of Allah, and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, ask of Allah alone; If you seek help, seek help of Allah alone. Know that if the whole nation were to gather together to benefit you with anything, they would only benefit you with something that Allah had already prescribed for you, and that if they gather together to harm you with anything, they would harm you only with something Allah had already prescribed for you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried." (Al-Tirmidhi)

The tradition was related by at-Tirmidhi, who said it was good and sound. In a version other than that of at-Tirmidhi it reads:

Be mindful of Allah, you will find Him before you. Get to know Allah in prosperity and He will know you in adversity. Know that what has passed you by was not going to befall you, and that what has befallen you was not going to pass you by. And know that victory comes with patience, relief with affliction, and ease with hardship. (Bukhari)

Thus, the Prophet (SAW) was able to train the young minds (his Companions) around him on discipline, dependence on Allah, belief in destiny, and other moral values. Having been properly trained by the Prophet morally and intellectually, these people played crucial roles in the spread of Islam and its defence no matter the consequences. Some of them went on to become brave warriors and visionary leaders during and after the life of the Prophet. A typical example among those young men is Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's nephew. He is famed as the first youth to embrace Islam. He was an embodiment of bravery and wisdom. The role he assumed on the eve of the Prophet's migration to Madinah was legendary: Daring possible attack by the unbelievers, Ali gracefully took the responsibility to sleep on the bed of the Prophet (Al-Mukhzanji 56-57). The rationale behind this arrangement was for Ali to return monies and valuables which had been kept with the Prophet in trust to their rightful owners. It was not to fool the enemies, as may be widely but wrongly assumed. The Prophet had to do this because of his scintillating quality of trustworthiness and truthfulness, for which he had been known ever before his call to Prophethood.

The above prophetic guidelines for the youths are in tandem with the general Islamic model for training the youths as designed by Allah in the Qur'an. As observed earlier, in the Qur'an, Allah narrates the story of seven young men, known as Ashab al-Kahf (the dwellers of the cave). Their aversion for the regime of corruption in the society made them to seclude themselves in the cave outskirts the town. Likewise, there was a narration about how Luqman, a pious servant of Allah, admonished his son and trained him to be morally and spiritually responsible (Oloyede 663). More essentially, the Qur'an narrates how the young Yusuf escaped the temptation of his mistress, thereby setting a good example for the youths in all ages.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The paper has established the fact that most Nigerian youths are exposed to moral decadence. It considers the person of the Prophet Muhammad as a worthy role model for the youths to follow. Based on the previous discussions in the foregoing paragraphs, following recommendations are therefore necessary to address ethical problems among the youths:

1. Parents should discharge their parental duties by nurturing their wards in line with the teachings of Islam, using the personality of the Prophet as a model. Also, they should emulate Luqman in giving their children and wards proper training in line with the Islamic teachings;
2. Government should provide an enabling environment for the moral well-being of the youths and use the relevant agencies such as Ministry of Youths and Sports, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and National Orientation Agency (NOA) for their moral orientation;
3. Government should re-introduce Religious Studies as a core subject at the Primary and Secondary Schools for the pupils and students to be morally trained in line with the exemplary life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW);
4. Public preachers should lay more emphasis on the moral qualities of the Prophet (SAW) in their lectures;
5. Modern writers should adopt a moralistic approach when discussing the biography of the Prophet as against the historical approach which is common; and,
6. The mass media should be censored to retrain them from exposing the youths to immoral tendencies in view of their position as leaders of tomorrow.

In conclusion, the strategic position of the youths in the society has been articulated. With their invaluable qualities and skills, they can make significant contributions to the development of any society if given opportunities. For, they are a veritable asset and potential leaders of tomorrow. But the reality is that youths have constituted a liability in many nations, especially in Nigeria. This is due to failure on the part of parents, society, and school, and indeed, government at local, state, and federal levels. Nevertheless, these problems can be addressed through the inspirational biography of the Prophet (SAW) in his capacity as a perfect role model for the youths and for the entire Muslim community in general.

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