

# THE PLACE OF SPIRITUALITY IN THE TRAINING OF A CHILD FOR FUTURE LEADERSHIP

## POSITION: MODELS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

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### Abstract

The fast-growing social vices in our society today may not be unconnected to the fact that they have their roots emanating from the corrupted moral fabrics traceable to poor spiritual upbringing of children in the homes, religious organisations, institutions of learning, and society. The growing trend today leaves much to be desired, as evidenced by the crop of leaders the organisation produces. This has further given reasons to question the spiritual formation of these Church leaders as everybody is, to a certain degree, a product of their past upbringing. Both historical and descriptive methods were employed in carrying out the work. One of the contributory factors to societal moral decay was the gradual decline in teaching religious and moral education, which had negatively impacted society by producing leaders who lacked the ability and capability to lead effectively in society. However, there are several examples of leaders in the Bible whose leadership qualities serve as role models to contemporary Church leaders, such as Joseph, Samuel, and so on. Consequently, there was the need to retrace the good old virtue of inculcating moral values in children, beginning from home to school and society.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Spiritual upbringing, Child, Future leader

### Introduction

Scholars such as Shahnoza,<sup>1</sup> Chi-Kin,<sup>2</sup> Ekpoh, Edet & Ukoh,<sup>3</sup> have shown that the level of training in spirituality, which begins from the home to institutions of learning and the wider society (<https://www.nu.edu>) has, to a large extent, formed the fulcrum, on which excellent leadership qualities are produced in young people. To this end, spirituality becomes an essential tool for effective training of the total child as a future leader today. While spirituality is not peculiar to Christianity because it cuts across different religions,<sup>4</sup> it entails that leaders from other religious backgrounds equally share in the poor leadership output that is visible in the society today. One underlying objective of spirituality, despite the varied religious practices, is that it aims to shape the human mind and attitude toward living a mutual life with one's creator and the environment one lives in. With this, a child brought up under sound spiritual guidance would naturally have less chance of causing harm to his environment.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the child would focus on improving his environment due to the virtues inculcated in him.

Unger defines spirituality as the quality of being spiritual, as opposed to being materialistic.<sup>6</sup> Enns and Strauss further define Spirituality as the outward working of inward devotion, which is the living expression of one's spiritual nature.<sup>7</sup> By the foregoing, spirituality governs and determines people's daily living.<sup>8</sup> The fact that spirituality should govern and determine people's daily living by way of choices they make in response to their faith alone, Enns and Strauss explain the potency of spirituality in shaping children along with sound moral principles and tenets that guarantee effective leadership qualities in them.<sup>9</sup> Spirituality is, therefore, a necessity that homes, institutions of learning as well as

society should imbibe to produce future leaders that would lead, govern and direct societies in manners that encourage growth, development and peaceful environments for human co-existence.<sup>10</sup>

When it comes to spirituality, the Jews had a structure of training their children that began from home to institutions of learning.<sup>11</sup> The *Shema*, a Jewish daily liturgical service, was recited first thing in the morning and last before bedtime.<sup>12</sup> This practice provided a Jewish child with the foundational spiritual education that would nurture the child to become a future leader. Today, not only does the Jewish nation have records of outstanding leaders in the scriptures, but they are for our lessons.

The fact is that while society today embodies a crop of leaders whose moral conducts are at variance with products of sound moral system, it cannot be far from the fact that most of them come from homes where proper spiritual foundation is lacking. Such leaders only reflect a group of spiritually malnourished people, considering the level of corrupt practices they perpetrated. Incidentally, that they are either Christians or Muslims suggests having religious pedigrees that lack positive proven evidence of sound spiritual background. Against this background, this research work posits that good spiritual upbringing of a child right from home is an antidote to the fast-growing social vices in our society today. Also, to build sustainable development and a sustainable future, spirituality is an essential tool. Spirituality as part of the human educational system becomes necessary in training the child to attain both physical and spiritual maturity for effective service in society. This is the gap this research work seeks to fill.

### **Some Biblical Leadership Models**

The Bible contains some leaders whose leadership styles are worthy of emulation. It is, however, necessary to examine their lives for possible lessons that will serve as testaments to good spiritual upbringing in their homes. The biblical characters to be examined include Moses, Joseph, Samuel, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

**Moses:** One wonders why Jews do not neglect their children's education. It was the duty of Jewish parents to train their children strictly pertaining to the things of their religion. In narrating how Thermuthis, Pharaoh's daughter, found Moses by the river and arranged for his upkeep, which eventually fell into the hands of his mother, Jochebed, it is not gainsaying that Moses' consciousness of his Jewish background and his achievements were consequent on the quality of education he received in Egypt.<sup>13</sup> This can be attributed to the effort of his mother, Jochebed, who would have given him the foundational education on which his accomplishments thrived. Moses' relinquishment of the luxury in the palace in Egypt, though occasioned by a circumstance that necessitated fleeing for his life, was a costly sacrifice that only childhood instructions given by his mother could furnish. Although he also received training in the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22), which indeed formed a substantial amount of his educational background, the foundational education, which cradles basic human educational system, is what his mother gave him. This is because later in life, his attachment to his people, as seen in his killing of an Egyptian who was fighting his fellow Jewish brother, is a reflection of the influence of his foundational education. In other words, the Jewish consciousness in him would have been the product of the foundational education given to him by his mother. Otherwise, being trained in Egyptian wisdom alone would not have given him that sense of Jewish connection that prompted his rescue of his Jewish brother.

In leadership, Moses demonstrated a high level of spiritual discipline. Mandel describes him well when he points out:

Moses, the man who freed his people from slavery and led them to freedom, was a unique leader of the community, organizer, legislator, and intercessor for the people. One of his (Moses) most remarkable characteristics was his solitude for his people, in spite of their obstinate and contentious ways.<sup>14</sup>

**Joseph:** At an early stage, Joseph had a leadership prospect clearly shown in the series of dreams he shared with his siblings, who became jealous and sold him to Egypt as a slave (Gen. 37:1-28). Egypt and particularly Potiphar's house, became a testing ground to ascertain his level of spirituality when Potiphar's wife forced him to sleep with her and he ran away (Gen. 39). One would have thought it was an opportunity for the poor, handsome young Joseph to satisfy himself in bed with Potiphar's wife; Joseph chose not to compromise his faith as doing so would have contravened God's will and his master's. His non-compromising stand must have been from a deeply-rooted spiritual life inculcated by parental guidance to him.

As a leader in Egypt, he demonstrated the ability to forgive when his brothers thought their father's death was an opportunity for him to avenge their wickedness towards him. When they came and asked for mercy, Joseph, in response, told them that they meant it for evil but God turned it for good (Gen. 50:20)

What is commonly observed in the leadership of society today is the extent to which leaders tend to be discrete about those who should enjoy the dividends of democracy from their hands. As a way of punishing their opponents and those who did not vote for them, they tend to deny them social amenities meant for the generality of the populace.

**Samuel:** During his day, he operated in three different offices: a Judge, a Priest and a Prophet. As a child, he was an answered prayer to his mother, who prayed and promised to dedicate him back to God if her prayer was answered. God finally granted her request, and the mother nurtured Samuel before releasing him to God as she promised (1 Sam.1:24-27). Longman distinguished between the upbringing of Samuel and Eli's sons when he remarked:

Samuel was quite different from the wicked sons of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas. While they stole from the sacrifices and slept with women who ministered at the tabernacle, Samuel was ministering before the Lord.<sup>15</sup>

In his farewell speech to Israel, Samuel presented himself and his tenure for scrutiny by the people when he said in 1Samuel 12:2-3:

Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day. 3 Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right. (NIV).

In verses 4 and 5, the people responded by saying, ' "You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone's hand." 5. Samuel said to them, "The Lord is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand. He is witness, they said". It is sad to note that contemporary leaders rarely present themselves for such scrutiny. While it is expected that leaders avail themselves of such appraisal at the end of their tenure, the extent to which some contemporary leaders decline suggests the level of insincerity in their leadership to the people.

**Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego:** These were Jewish young men taken along as captives in the 605 BC Babylonian captivity. While Daniel was known for his stand not to defile himself with the food from the king's table (Daniel 1:8), Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were resolute in their

decision not to bow down before the golden image. They were prepared to die when threatened with a blazing fiery furnace heated seven times. Douglas and Tenney describe their resilience thus, "These young men, however, remained true to their ancestral faith, courteously refusing the royal food and wine."<sup>16</sup>

### **Spirituality and Upbringing of Children**

Before embarking on the place of spirituality in building total child, it is pertinent to briefly define the concepts "child and total child" in this section. According to Robinson, a child is a boy or a girl between birth and physical immaturity.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that a child is fragile yet to be a responsible person who requires parental attention. Consequently, it is expedient to appreciate the extent of fragility in children and why neglecting to give them the needed spiritual guidance at the early stages of life would ultimately result in laying a foundation with a disastrous prospect. Within the context of the definition, a child is depicted as a young person who is simply immature and, hence, not responsible. Therefore, for a child to be responsible, it means giving the requisite spiritual training that would form them into an effective future leader.

The fact that the child is defined as a young and not yet a responsible person who is unable to do something for himself and that only spirituality shapes him into a person that can contribute positively to society, it is not out of place to assert that the phrase "the total child" implies a child that is sound both physically and spiritually. The word "total" refers to the whole sum or amount", suggesting being complete or to a full measure.<sup>18</sup> The total child is, therefore, a person who is complete both in mental and spiritual development and embodies qualities that portray the child as a respected prospective leader in society because of the training given to them. The article "The making of a total child: who is responsible?" further concurs with the assertion that "a total child is one that has complete physical, motor, intellectual, social-emotional, language and, of course, spiritual development."<sup>19</sup>

Recent research suggests that spiritual development involves 'transactions that are characterised by transcendence leading to a clarity and commitment of beliefs and identity resulting in behaviours that contribute to the self and society.'<sup>20</sup> This assertion stresses the importance of spirituality relevant to the adolescent stage. However, "the transactions that are characterised by transcendence" form a common ground, which, in the case of the child, parental roles become essential in the development.

The biblical passage which says, "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6) underlines the philosophy behind Jewish culture of engaging in early training of children since training or education constitutes factors behind both physical and spiritual formation of the child every Jewish parent would not sacrifice.<sup>21</sup> The home as a school of learning is a basic fact that cannot be disputed. This is because the home forms the cradle of the human educational system and development in that it plays a significant role in equipping the formative stage of the child to become what God intends him to be.<sup>22</sup>

In the field of Psychology, an attempt to discover the child's thinking ability in relation to religion and spirituality was made. Psychologists, however, devised a research approach bothering on socio-cultural and socio-ecology. This approach and others show that the interaction between religious parents and their children largely shapes their children's concept of religion.<sup>23</sup> It is against this background that the home, particularly parents, plays important roles in the child's spiritual development, which in turn becomes beneficial to the child and society, as already highlighted. Furthermore, children who have quality time with their parents tend to develop emotionally. Where the contrary is the case, children's emotional and intellectual development tend to be affected negatively.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, the importance of early childhood education cannot be over-emphasized as it is critical to both the mental and spiritual development of the child, in which a solid basis for sustained future learning tends to develop the cognitive and social abilities of the child. (What's the Importance of Early

Child Education? Walden University Online Education Resource, n. d). It is an important time in children's lives because it is when they first learn how to interact with others, including peers, teachers and parents, and develop interests that will stay with them throughout their lives. It is a period when children undertake learning of fundamental social and emotional aptitudes, thereby building relationships with their parents and teachers, which in turn lays the basis for a prolonged education in the life of the child.<sup>25</sup>

It is, however, believed that before the child is enrolled into formal education, the foundation for strong spiritual growth would have been laid, on which formal education thrives. By this, the child's spiritual growth and development would go in the same proportion as his physical development, striking an equilibrium that will result in "building the total child" in society. Research carried out on schools, religious groups, cultural landscapes and ideas to ascertain the spiritual development of children concludes that children's relationship with God begins at a point of religious socialisation, and subsequently is shaped by how they are nurtured in their environment. This proposal emphasises the importance of the society and institutions of learning in furthering the spiritual development of the total child, which begins from the home.

In education, it is believed that the human mind, from the beginning, is like an empty slate (*Tabularasa*) before ideas are imprinted on it by the reaction of the senses to the external world of objects.<sup>26</sup> Education, in this regard, plays a significant role in assisting the mind to assimilate the external world of objects to the advantage of the person in question and the society in which the person lives. Consequently, spirituality becomes an effective tool in directing the mind by focusing one towards his relationship with His creator, enabling him to channel the positive experiences gathered to accomplish God's will for one's life.

The process involved in nurturing the "total child" through education covers the three domains of human personality: spirit, soul and body. While ethical and intellectual training touches on the aspects of the human soul and the intellect, the spiritual facet of man touches on the aspect of his relationship with his Creator, which is nurtured by his engagement in spiritual activities. These spiritual activities have proven effective even in adults' lives, especially as revealed in an examination carried out in 1997 on Mental Health Foundation service users who held dearly to spirituality as being effective in maintaining mental health. When asked to put in writing proof of the effectiveness of spirituality in their lives, responses showed that spirituality had proven effective in guidance, giving a sense of purpose and comfort, allowing the opportunity for expression of personal pains and having inner love and compassion for people (Mental Health Foundation, 2021).

### **Negative Effects of Poor Spiritual Upbringing**

The prevailing societal ills today can also be related to the poor spiritual upbringing of children in society, beginning from the home to the school and the larger community. Today, due to a lack of spiritual guidance in homes, schools and society, children who are products of the negligence of spirituality have constituted the crops of leaders termed corrupt in our societies today. The corrupt nature of society today has its roots in the family. The family, being the basic unit of human society, is supposed to serve as the basis or starting point for a child's foundational education. Spirituality, as part of the human educational system, becomes necessary in training the child to attain both physical and spiritual maturity for effective service in society.

Moreover, The National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (1998), section 2, subsection 13c points out that one of the purposes of pre-primary education is to "Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc.)." Good as it may, it should be noted that pre-primary education, as spelt out by the same National Policy on Education, says that it is education for children ranging from 3 to 5 years,



an age range falling within the formative period considered earlier as delicate and necessary for absolute parental attention and training.<sup>27</sup> Enrolling those children early could also mean denying them the necessary parental attention, which should build them spiritually into responsible future leaders. In other words, in an attempt to create a favourable condition for personal career demands, some parents are quick to relieve themselves of the duty of giving that basic education to their children by sending them to kindergarten at such a tender age. This has contributed a lot to the children's poor mental and spiritual state, which has almost become impossible to correct at Primary, Secondary or Tertiary school levels. The ugly trends, such as disobedience, stealing, bullying, lateness to school, immorality, cultism and the like, are increasingly becoming the order of the day in institutions of learning.<sup>28</sup> In his submission, given the increasing moral decadence in institutions of learning (Primary, Secondary and Higher), Bosade opines that schools and colleges have lost their sacred character as formation centres and have become breeding grounds for thugs, secret cults, gangsters, rapists and prostitutes.<sup>29</sup>

The ideal situation is that after a proper spiritual foundation is laid in a child, the school builds on the foundation laid and finally releases the child to society for nation-building. However, the contrary is true today, as solid and spiritual foundations are scarcely tenable at home. Therefore, children grow up as products of poor spiritual foundations from homes to schools and society.

According to Ige, "To say that there is corruption in Nigeria is to say the obvious. Corruption has almost become part of our culture. It is one of the major social vices ravaging the Nigerian society."<sup>30</sup> Recent findings show that the Nigerian corruption index is increasingly alarming. It was in response to the endemic nature of corruption in the country that the former Primate of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Peter Akinola observes, "Our political leaders have made corruption their habit."<sup>31</sup> Looking at the rate of corruption perpetuated in society today, one does not need an assessment of the extent of spirituality entrenched in the homes and societies such leaders come from to ascertain the poor spiritual condition under which they were brought up.

Furthermore, reflecting President Muhammadu Buhari's government's frustration in curbing corruption in the country, Fasan, while quoting Sagay, the Chairman of the Presidential Advisory Committee against Corruption (PACAC), says: "Nigeria was at crossroads and overwhelmed by corruption which had become a way of life for the elites who he accused of wheeling and dealing with the fate of the country."<sup>32</sup> Corroborating the above assertion, Ige declares:

We cannot run away from the embarrassing truth that corruption in Nigeria almost passes for state policy. Yes, some keen observers of the phenomenon actually say that corruption is so endemic in the Nigerian society that the socio-economic and political system can almost not function without it.<sup>33</sup>

It is discouraging that Nigeria, considered one of the most religious countries in the world, is also adjudged one of the world's most corrupt nations. One could see a paradox of life capable of robbing the reality of spiritual bankruptcy, which pervades Nigerian homes, schools and societies. Another area where corruption is visible in the Nigerian leadership circle is ethnicity, where a tribe, among others, tends to dominate leadership by a wide occupation of strategic leadership positions in the country. This has raised agitations by other nationalities that feel marginalised and oppressed.

### **Factors that are Responsible for Poor Spiritual Upbringing of Children**

**Lack of Proper Parental Upbringing:** The importance of early parental training/upbringing, particularly in childhood, which falls within the formative years of human development, cannot be overemphasised. The childhood stage is a stage of dependence that requires absolute parental attention. Highlighting the importance of parental training to the child, Maccoby opines that whatever a child learns from his parents stays with him throughout his life.<sup>34</sup> This assertion concurs with the biblical position in (Prov. 22:6), "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." What is

common today is that parents are so busy that they hardly pay attention to their children. Children are either enrolled in early education to keep them busy so parents can pursue their careers/businesses or are left with surrogates who may not have proven spiritual integrity.

The dependent nature of the child requires not only the help of parents in terms of physical needs but also mental, emotional, moral and spiritual needs, which are developed by the help of their parents.<sup>35</sup> The spiritual development of the child often comes mechanically, but also with constant instructions from parents as the child sees how parents put to practice what they preach at home. The children either see the contrary of what parents preach or never receive any spiritual instructions as parents lack the time to teach.

The importance of spirituality is also emphasised in that one of the first things the child should learn from parents is how to worship God ([www.arma-institute.com](http://www.arma-institute.com)). This reflects parents' critical role, without which children's spiritual foundation would not be properly laid. However, it all depends on the parents' spirituality level, as simply giving them the necessary attention does not automatically mean that the children will be given the spiritual foundation needed for their development.

Poor Quality of CRS Teachers/Non-inclusion of CRS in Secondary School Curriculum in some states in Nigeria is a key factor responsible for poor spirituality. In many Nigerian secondary schools today, priority is not given to teachers with sound spiritual backgrounds to handle Christian Religious Studies. During the secondary school days of one of the co-authors of this work, his CRS teacher, a Youth Corp member who used to smoke cigarettes, was on one occasion asked a question concerning the biblical position that if a person slaps somebody on one cheek, he should turn the other. The teacher responded that the person slapped can slap back, if possible, ten times. With the fallen spiritual standards in our institutions of learning, one can only imagine that there are many of such kinds of aforementioned CRS teachers or, perhaps worse, that form the body of school teaching staff. Hence, Okebukola remarks about the students of such teachers as products of a school system that has shoved the teaching of religious and moral instruction into the background.<sup>36</sup> Amid this character deficiency, some state governments in Nigeria have removed CRS from the secondary school curriculum.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that the poor spiritual upbringing of children contributes significantly to the moral bankruptcy of the crop of leaders the society presents today. It, however, observes that the basis for solid spiritual upbringing of the child begins from the home before institutions of learning and eventually the wider society. The Old Testament Bible has samples of leaders whose spiritual upbringings contributed to the successes they recorded while in leadership positions. The biblical characters discussed in this paper serve as models for contemporary Nigerian political and church leaders.

## Recommendations

1. There is a need to correct societal ills by building a solid foundation for our children to grow. Parents in this regard have a lot to do by giving their children the first education starting at home. This should lay the basic foundation that would make institutional education smooth and effective.
2. The educational institutions, on the other hand, should revive their moral and religious education systems to advance the children's spiritual growth. They should also give attention to the staff they employ as that determines to a great extent the kind of influence exerted on the child when growing.
3. To groom up the total child who is spiritually sound and responsible for leadership in society, the schools should be able to encourage that aspect of spirituality and encourage students to embrace a life of prayer and regular worship.

4. Our institutions of learning should serve as authentic places for raising future leaders by giving them the desired attention. To this end, teachers' spirituality level should be considered when employed, as students are believed to learn more from what they observe the teachers do than what they give them from the book.
5. Leadership at every level should be open to public scrutiny. This will ensure that those in leadership positions are people of high integrity and without questionable characters that would command followers' trust, loyalty and respect.
6. Leaders are expected to maintain moral discipline and a high level of restraint in managing public funds.
7. Leaders should know that they are there to serve. Consequently, the populace requires loyalty, commitment and accountability, which they should be ready to subject themselves to while in and after leadership position.
8. For free and equitable dispensation of fairness, appointments into leadership positions should reflect Federal Character as enshrined in the constitution to alley any feeling of distrust among people.

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