

Religion without Morality as the bane of development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country that has attended giant stride in religious activities; even with international acclaim, yet adjudged one of the most corrupt nations in the world. In fact, the recent rating of the Transparency International placed Nigeria on a high pedestal in corruption index. This poor moral disposition has affected not just the personal lives of individuals but also the general development of the nation. Consequently, the country suffers retardation in virtually every sector of her developmental strides. The aim of this paper therefore is to unravel through phenomenological method of enquiry the immoralities of a religious nation and the negative effects on her development. Findings from the study showed that many Nigerians do not live up to their religious moral demands, which of course, has been a serious hindrance to national development.

Key words: Religion, morality, crises, development and society.

Introduction

Religion is a noble institution that seeks to establish relationship with the natural and the supernatural world of existence. It instills the awareness and consciousness of the spiritual existence of being above the human nature. This consciousness awakens in man the sense of morality which enables him to be at peace not just with his physical world but also in pursuit of his spiritual well being (Agha, 2003). In Nigeria today, while this sense of the supernatural maintains a steady increase, the corresponding moral rectitude degenerates to the detriment of the developmental aspirations of the nation. Ezeme (2008) observed with dismay the thriving rate of all sorts of evil in Nigeria amidst her religious inkling saying,

Religion therefore occupies an important place in Nigeria but in-spite of this, the country appears to be the home base of all forms of irreligious happenings. The ever increasing wave of crime and the other forms of unwholesome behaviours perpetrated in the nation call for reflection on how religious or otherwise Nigerian citizens are at present (pp. 53-54).

Even with the religious explosion in Nigeria, the moral disposition of her citizens is still at very low ebb. The situation in Nigeria has become a semblance of the eight century period of Amos in Israel (5; 6), where social injustice, sheer

hatred, avarice, bribery and corruption, covetousness, insecurity, kidnapping for ransom, rape, human and child trafficking and all sorts of social injustice have taken the center stage, even as the number of religious centers maintain its parallel dimension without corresponding synergy.

It is therefore the thrust of this paper to bring to limelight the moral decays of a religious nation and the visible effects on her developmental strides. The objectives however include to establish a water-tight relationship between religion and morality; and also to instill moral rectitude in the psyche of Nigerians, with the hope of achieving a commensurate moral habit to the nation's religious boast. To achieve these objectives, the phenomenological method of examination will be employed in the interpretation of data collected, aimed at giving objective and unbiased analysis to issues.

Morality and Religion

There are series of arguments on the relationship between morality and religion. Some are of the view that both cannot be separated, while other scholars like Immanuel Kant, John Hick and Bernard Williams held the view that both can exist independent of the other. These scholars supported the ability of secular value frameworks to provide useful guides or moral directions. Kant (1785) postulated that the sense of morality in man is associated with his nature as a rational being, a feature which distinguished him from every other creature. According to him, morality consists in commitment to act for the general welfare as discerned by impartial reason. Hick (2004) fairly shared the views of Kant when he averred that morality is an offshoot of the gregarious nature of man. He stressed that the consciousness of the implications of human actions to his neighbours is the propelling force that ignites moral actions. He however related it to God not on the basis of its direct link with God, rather on the premise that the human realm is a function of God. On his part, [Williams](#) (1972) argued that,

Either one's motives for following the moral word of God are moral motives, or they are not. If they are, then one is already equipped with moral motivations, and the introduction of God adds nothing extra. But if they are not moral motives, then they will be motives of such a kind that they cannot appropriately motivate *morality* at all ... (pp. 64-65).

Meanwhile, the concern here is not to advance the already arguments but to assert that genuine religion instills sense of morality in any society that attaches itself to it. Both religion and morality are aspects of human existence that defines and redefines human interactions and exhibitions in any society. Religion is both conscious and unconscious in man. It reflects in virtually every human existence. Agha (2003: 43) upheld that "the destruction of religion will automatically lead to the destruction of morality also". According to him, confusion and decay are bound to result in the society whenever men lose hold of their religion. This is evidenced in the Nigerian

society where social injustice and all sorts of moral decay have become the order of the day. Morality and religion is the relationship between religious views and morals. Religions have value frameworks that guide adherents in determining between right and wrong, which is the pursuit of morality. These frameworks according to Epstein (2010) are outlined and interpreted by various sources such as holy books, oral and written traditions, and religious leaders. In the same vein, a Christian theologian, Dixon (2008: 115) argued that "religious beliefs are necessary to provide moral guidance and standards of virtuous conduct in an otherwise corrupt, materialistic, and degenerate world". He further maintained that "Religions certainly do provide a framework within which people can learn the difference between right and wrong".

Religious commentators have asserted that a moral life cannot be led without an absolute lawgiver as a guide and who sanctions such actions (<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?>). Within the wide range of ethical traditions, religious traditions co-exist with secular value frameworks such as humanism, utilitarianism, and others. There are many types of religious values. Modern monotheistic religions, such as Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and to a certain degree the traditional polytheism which define right and wrong by the laws and rules set forth by their respective gods and as interpreted by religious leaders within the respective faith (<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?>). Gregory (2005) confirmed the assertion of theists who affirmed that societal belief in a creator god is instrumental towards providing the moral, ethical and other foundations necessary for a healthy, cohesive society. Therefore, it is the take of the writer that there is at least a driving force for morality in religion, which of course cannot be denied no matter how logical on the contrary.

Nigeria as a religious nation

That Nigeria is a religious nation remains a fact that cannot be refuted, counting on the religious exhibition of her citizens. Adeyemi (2010) strongly maintained that religion is so sensitive to Nigerians that many are not only ready to defend it at all costs, but are ready to give their lives for it. Religion is very sacred and central to the existence of most Nigerians irrespective of social class or status. Imosemi (2012) maintained that "Nigerians hold their religion very dear and a negative allusion to any religion, either deliberate or in error, is a sure recipe for discord or even violent reaction and can snap the already fragile fibre that still holds the country as one" (<http://www.punchng.com/opinion>).

The edifices of churches and mosques that abound in the streets and neighbourhoods bear eloquent evidence to this fact. The blaring prayers that emanate from churches and mosques, along with the ecstatic religious gatherings seen everywhere, are clear indicators of the value Nigerians place on religion. One would have assumed that the more churches and mosques that spring up in every nook and cranny of Nigeria, the higher the morals in the society. But the case is on the reverse. The situation is that the more religious the nation gets, the more the

society becomes wanting in moral standing. The nation never encountered the type of bloodshed experienced from religious extremists, political desperadoes, ritual killers, armed robbers, kidnappers, internet scammers, university cultists, and lynch mobs prevailing in the country today. Onwuka (2012) lamented that life has become so cheap and brutish that everyday seems to be a bonanza. He insists that while other countries show their exploit in technology, Nigeria has become a stake holder in the export of Religion in the international market, with nothing or little to show for it. This accounts for the number of religious men and women who are sent abroad on religious assignment even to the countries that brought the new ways of life. It now becomes a case of an expert apprentice who overcomes his master in trade and therefore needs to carry him along.

Evidently, the tenets of integrity, hard work, fairness, justice, and respect for authority are values espoused by both Christianity and Islam, the two major religions in Nigeria. Ironically, the above mentioned values are on great decline in the society as there seem to be a direct correlation in the increase in religious activities and the increase in crime, corruption and poverty. Okwueze (2002) and Edo (1994) lamented that societal values have been sacrificed on the altar of material values. According to Okwueze,

In the Nigerian society a culture has emerged which prizes material success and possessions higher than any other value in the life of people. Success in material wealth was lauded no matter how it is achieved, challenging those still left with some vestige of moral restraint to abandon their restraint if they must succeed (2002: 237).

As the number of churches and mosques increases almost on a daily basis, and in a most unprecedented manner, one would expect a corresponding decline in crime and corruption, greater progress in the welfare of the people, and advancement in society generally.

Ironically, despite the nation's exploits in religion, the people are still beclouded in ungodly lives; a people without scruples. Onwuka (2012) radically noted that it is rare to do business with a Nigerian pastor, deacon, knight, elder, brother, sister, imam, mullah, mallam, alhaji or alhaja without the person laying landmines of bribes and deception on your path. From every indication, Nigerians seem to wallow in wilful amnesia as regards God's incompatibility with sin. People mention God's name all the time and pray for his help even in the process of committing heinous crimes. The politician, who seeks to alter the votes in his favour, asks for God's blessings and even goes further to host thanksgiving services to be attended by the hierarchy of the church, when his devilish wish has been accomplished. Most of them even build places of worship to the admiration of the poor worshippers and religious leaders, who never care how funds for the project were acquired. That, to them is never necessary and uncalled for.

At over 50 years, Nigeria is still contending with poor economy amidst her religiosity. For instance, since independence the country have had high profile

military and democratic leaders (Christians and Muslims) most of whom only succeeded in exploiting the economy. From that period, the leadership of the country was dominated especially by Muslims who neglected the ethical teachings of Islam on justice and fair deal. These periods were daunted with series of immoral and corrupt practices which consequently laid the foundation for the evils that have held the nation to ransom.

Furthermore, the frivolous worship of wealth and material possession in the society has eroded the values of hard work, integrity, forthrightness and delayed gratification. The manner in which corrupt politicians and businessmen are idolized by the society is shameful. It sends a very odious signal to the society and has eaten deep into it.

While all these things are going on, some of the nation's religious leaders are not helping matters, a good number of them are consummated in the acquisition of wealth, hence one can now see a good number of them controlling fleets of cars and acquiring jets at the expense of unsuspecting members. In the face of oppression in the hands of leaders, majority of them do not care for the poor masses in order not to lose contact and influence with these corrupt leaders. They shield away from their prophetic rights of confronting them in their immorality, hiding under the pretence that the spiritual wellbeing of the people should be their God assigned mandate. Such impression by all intent is wrong and should be corrected. It is the physical wellbeing of the people that determine their spiritual disposition; and the spirit does not exist in isolation of the physical except for the dead. So, for anyone who worths the name priest, pastor, imam, or whatever name and cares only for the spirit, such persons should do well relocate to the cemetery, which is the abode of the spirits. After all, in the Bible, Amos, Nathan, Elijah and Elisha were great prophets of God who accosted corrupt leaders of their time. Jesus was a thorn in the flesh of the corrupt Jewish officials, the scribes and the Pharisees in their hypocritical life styles. Even the Quran frowns at evil and injustice re-iterating that Allah who is just does not condone evil and punishes those who derail from the parts of justice and fairness (Surah Al-Imran 3). It was Einsten in Ngwoke (2001: 11) who sanctioned that "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil in this world is for good people to do nothing". Giving this background, one wonders what forms the inspiration of such religious leaders who are made of body and flesh, but appeal only to the spirit. Rather than challenging corrupt leaders, a good number of religious and traditional leaders in Nigeria have chosen to honour them with titles and commendations, just to secure their "fat envelopes" and other ostensible. When the river is soiled from its source, the entire system will be left in total disarray.

The Immoralities of a Religious Nation

The Nigerian society is obviously bedeviled with so many immoralities, ranging from social, political, economic and religious problems. However, the few discussed here are only given prominence because of their current ravaging effects on the nation.

Insecurity

The state of insecurity in Nigeria today has assumed a sophisticated dimension. Onaiyekan in the *Daily Sun* regretted that the state of insecurity in Nigeria is as a result of moral neglect when he said, “You can’t expect to have a peaceful and secure country when the minimum requirement of good behaviours, honesty, integrity, especially in high places are completely neglected” (*Daily Sun*, May 31, 2013 p. 13). Although the civil war of 1967 was a major threat to the existence of the country and its security system, recent happenings in the country are clear indications that the security system of the nation is yet to be established on a solid basement. While the civil carnage was fought with crude guns; it has now become a matter of graduation from gun to bomb; a drift from analog to digital. The convocation is what no one would wish to witness.

Regrettably, most of the cases of threat to life and property are often associated with religion; right from the Maitatsine crisis of the 1980s to the current boko haram menace. There is no safe haven in Nigeria today; the hiding places have been invaded. People are no longer safe even in their houses as kidnappers have consistently broken the iron doors of mansions to whisk away their targeted victims. The activities of various militant groups have all placed bare the porous security networks in the country. The transport sectors have continued unabated to fail the nation. While the poor spread their bloods on the roads amidst robbery attacks, even when our roads are under security blocks; the airways hold the rich and the nation’s plutocrats to ransom even as they try to maneuver road carnages, assassination and other road disturbances, with series of air crashes, which recently claimed the life of a serving governor and a former security chief. The events of the last flooding will always remain indelible in the history of the country especially among the states in the coastal areas. The implication therein is that not even the ecology is safe. There is definitely no hiding place in Nigeria, as both nature and humanity have risen against the nation.

Bribery and Corruption

The duo of bribery and corruption are serious contagious diseases that have endemically and indirectly involved most Nigerians. Just like soil that covers the land crusts, bribery and corruption are now seen everywhere, while the ability to contend and if possible avoid them become a courage and sacrifice yet to be made by Nigerians. Ilevbare (2012) elevated corruption to the rank of a state, describing it as the 37th state of the country. According to him, “corruption has become a State of the Federation, drawing its weekly and monthly allowances from the Federation account unabashedly” (punchng.com). Reacting to the recent presidential state pardon granted to the former governor of Bayelsa State Diepriye Alamieyeseigha, who was convicted for money laundry, Emmanuel Fadele of the Catholic Development, Justice and Peace in an interview granted to the *Daily Sun* regretted that by such singular act, the nation has once again displayed her half-measured war

against corruption. He lamented that in Nigeria, “corruption has become a full citizen with all rights and the most romanced” (Daily Sun, April 9, 2013 p. 8).

The Transparency International had severally rated Nigeria high on corruption, an indication that the menace has become endemic, cutting across every sectors of the country (Egbunu, 2009). In the recent rating, Nigeria was ranked 139th out of 176 countries in Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption_in_Nigeria). Corruption, as Odey (2001) and Badejo (2009) argued is as old as the country itself. Both Oyeshile (2000) and Dibie (2004) contend that the cankerworms are manifested in both the public and private realms of the nation. Omoregbe (2000) lamented that Nigerians have erroneously taken them for “virtues” and as such, cherished by many. Odo (2002: 272) in disguise maintained that for the public office holders, “life would be miserable for any public officer who refuses to succumb to the pressure of corruption”. Ejizu (2012:6) described it as “a scourge, a slow killer, a moral disease that has eaten so deep into the social fabric of this country”.

Achebe (1983:38) who supposedly was among those who did pioneering work on the subject matter traced the menace to the influence of power. To that effect he averred, “Corruption goes with power; and whatever the average man may have, it is not power. Therefore, to hold any useful discussion of corruption, we must first locate it where it properly belongs in the hands of the powerful”. On the bid to exonerate the common masses, he insisted that Nigerians are only what they are simply because their leaders are not what they are supposed to be. Similar view was shared by Ndubisi (1999) who strongly believed that the duo of bribery and corruption are systematically planned, executed, and perpetrated by those in the leadership position. However, Ayida (1990) and Egbunu (2009) appear to differ on the perpetration of corruption by the powerful alone. Meanwhile they admitted that the menace has its tap root on the powerful (leaders), but does not in any way concentrate there, rather degenerates to the common men on the streets and cities. Okwueze (1996) in his submission indicted leaders at various levels including religious leaders, most of whom he regretted are dupes.

Although, both the leaders and the led are to be blamed on the thriving trend of bribery and corruption in the country, greater reproach ought to be on the leaders who are the captains that dictate the tune for the followers. With responsible leadership in place, free from all sorts of corrupt practices and with stringent measures in place, the led will be left with no other option on the contrary. Thus giving credence to Achebe’s (1983:12) assertion that “Nigerians are what they are because their leaders are not what they should be”.

Electoral malpractices

Elections in Nigeria often left many with nothing to be desired as far as the country’s electoral process is concerned. Electoral malpractices have seemingly become part of life in the electoral history of Nigeria. Ekpu (2007:5) described the

process as “a primitive enterprise, marked or marred by money and mayhem”. According to him, “every election period is war time, every zone is a war zone and every politician is a war lord who engages in massive malpractices to manipulate himself into office”. Although perfect elections devoid of skirmishes are rare, even in developed and advanced democratic nations of the world, the situation in Nigeria is quite alarming. The hue and cry for electoral malpractices in the country however grows and develops with each subsequent election, even in the midst of thriving religious awareness. Right from the inception of electoral outings in Nigeria, the stories have been pathetic and disheartening. The 2011 elections in Nigeria were acclaimed by many to be considerable when compared with previous ones. But with a close and thorough look, one will observe that the elections were nothing to write home about. The build-ups to the elections were marred by unprecedented violence, attacks and counter attacks, all in the desperate bid to undo the other. The campaign processes in most states of the country were turned to battle grounds as noted by Ekpu above, and the unprecedented violence that followed the elections remains a fierce sword in the hearts of many, which does not call for reminiscence.

Kidnapping

The growing rate of kidnapping in Nigeria today in the face of her flourishing religious life is gradually bringing to nothing our inkling to religion. The ugly trend which has its stronghold in the South Eastern part of the country has recently become a national phenomenon. Many saw the systematic abduction of the former governor of Anambra state, Christ Ngige on the 10th of July, 2003 as the launch pad of kidnapping in the zone. There is no doubt that this heinous crime is perpetrated by people who occupy seats and floors on Sundays and Fridays in different churches and mosques. To see how extreme people have neglected religion and its objects, ordained religious men and women have become victims of this menace. For instance, a priest of the catholic diocese of Nsukka Reverend Father Chijioke Amoke was kidnapped in the church premises, just as another Reverend Sister was hauled out in Abia state (*Daily Sun*, April 22, 2011 p. 5). These acts, of course, made nonsense of the biblical injunction, “Touch not my anointed, and do my prophet no harm”. The most worrisome that made mockery of the pulpit was the case of the General Overseer of Divine Justice Church in Owerri, Imo State, Pastor Clement Ezeigbo, who was arrested for alleged kidnapping and stocking of Indian hemp in his church (<http://sunnewsonline.com/new/cover/>). Of late, the Islamic boko haram a dreadful militant group recently turned its strategy to kidnapping for ransom. These are the ignoble extents the country has gone in the perpetration of evil; turning the house of God to den of robbers.

Effects of poor moral disposition on development

The height of religious status of the country if well harnessed and applied would have propelled the nation to an appreciable length. However, the situation has become pathetic and almost hopeless as the rate of moral decay in the country

questions not only the religious nature of the country but also the very essence of man as a moral being. Ani (2010) related it to the case of salt that is fast losing its desired taste, which makes it almost good for nothing. Morality which is an integral part of religion and as harbinger of change that stirs holistic development has eroded the nation and as a result, the entire sectors of the nation's development suffer the brunt. Onu in Egbunu (2009) highlighted the United Nation's identification of corruption as the bane of developing societies. He noted how lack of integrity and ethical conduct in Nigeria has been at the root of inefficiency, poor performance and decay in the public sector. Badejo (2009:33) also acknowledged the effects of bribery and corruption in a religious nation when he said, "The very corrupt country would take a very long time to be in the comity of nations reckoned with in terms of development". According to him, the effect on the society is general and stunts the development of any country. Ejizu (2012:6) decried that as a scourge, corruption has become a "recurring decimal keeping the country from moving forward and the greatest impediment to national development". He strongly maintained that whatever harm the civil war of 1967 must have done to the development of the country cannot be compared with the senseless destructions of bribery and corruption, which are now much more sophisticated and subtle. The economy is almost on the verge of collapse as a result of mismanagement and greed. It is now the situation of the few rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. The abundant God given resources have been polarized to the rich and the powerful, while the poor wallow in abject poverty hopelessly.

The educational sector is not inspiring much hope and confidence. Lamenting on the immoralities in the system, Ugwu (2002: 23) decried that "the level of corruption in our educational institutions has reached unprecedented height". Education as widely known, is the bedrock of every development, it therefore follows that any threat on the educational sector of any country brings about total collapse of the entire system. Any prank on the educational sector implies toying with the future of the country. Today, while much attention is not giving to the sector, people have sacrificed hardworking on the altar of cheating and short cuts.

Apart from the internal effects of immorality to development, the nation's external image has not been alluring and this does not go without threatening consequences on the development of the nation. It of course, drives away many international investors who would have invested in the country, thereby contributing to her development. The security system in the country is such that does not give much confidence to international investors. Eze (2002) blamed the low level investment in Nigeria to the activities of fraudsters insisting that "...the economy of the nation remains stagnant and thereby widens the gap between the rich and the poor" (p.11). On the personality of Nigerians outside the country, Odey (2001: 42) noted that "Everywhere in the world, Nigerians are generally feared like dogs, dreaded like criminals, cautiously approached like snakes and avoided like lepers". For Obeta (2002: 245), the level of immoralities in Nigeria has made her "...

notorious among the comity of nations". Therefore, the effects of immorality to the growth and development of any nation is always multi-dimensional and is capable of bringing a nation to a standstill.

Recommendations

1. The deferred vision 2020 might not be realized unless both Christians and Muslims turn new leaves of embracing the moral teachings of their respective religions without being hypocritical. This is one of the major problems confronting the practice of religion in Nigeria; people profess one thing and behave on the contrary.
2. Religious leader should see the welfare of the people both physical and spiritual as their concern and not alienate themselves from their physical needs. This is because some religious leaders attach themselves to the spiritual needs of the people, offering prayers without corresponding actions to secure their physical wellbeing.
3. The country will be a better place if both Christians and Muslims acknowledge the positive values of religion as supernatural interference in human existence, with utmost reverence.
4. Religious leaders should understand their prophetic assignment as a call to the service of the people, which entails ensuring their welfare through confronting corrupt leaders and shunning the current trend of unnecessary commendations and award of titles to political leaders who oppress the masses on their mandate.
5. Religious leaders should as well avoid unnecessary attachment to materialism and focus on their missionary assignment of teaching and possibly enforcing morality on their members.
6. Government should come up with legislations to reduce the excesses of religious organizations in order to check unnecessary religious tensions in the country.

Conclusion

Nigeria is fast growing, and is currently on the frontline on the rating table of religious nations in the world. The upsurge of people trooping in and out of churches and mosques on daily basis bear eloquent testimonies of the extent the nation has gone on that feat. But the degree this is practiced remains a difficult puzzle of disappointing end. Crime rate in Nigeria is not just escalating but has gone "digital", with increasing culture of impunity. This is because the core value of religion which is built on morality is often neglected and not taken into cognizance. It is therefore unfortunate that Nigerians only display and profess their religiosity without practising it. True religion ensures regard and appeal to both the known and the unknown. This regard and appeal give rise to fairness, decorum, love, among others, which of course is the field of morality. Whenever these values which cut across every human endeavour are neglected, religion has been abused and this accounts for the developmental drain the nation is suffering.

It is only when the nation takes advantage of her religious explosion and reflects that on her citizenry that religion will prove its richly adorned positive impacts of engendering peace and progress. Meanwhile, restoring the nation on the part of glory and true religion will not be an easy one, but will take determination and sacrifice to place the nation once again on the part of development. This indeed, is the religion that will be appreciated.

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