

**Religion and Ethical Standards; The Nexus in Nigeria's Democratic System and
Social-Entrepreneurship Perspectives**

By

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Introduction

An aspect of social life of man that has come to stay is the practice of religion which is not just interaction within and among peoples but also with the divine or divinity. An early view of what religion is all about is Sigmund Freud's postulation of religion being the 'opium of the people, the siege of the oppressed'. Today, different perceptions have been given to religion which to me, the synopsis could be a human practice characterized by different activities like praying, meditation, recitations, ablution among many others in which man endeavor to connect with the divine God ultimately for guardianship, favour, providence, provision, protection among others. It also goes with appealing and appeasing the divine. All religious practices do claim source or point of origin which mostly goes back to the creator Himself however, the veracity of this claim is a function of the degree of authenticity and reliability of the so-called revelation that brings this kind of religion into place in the first instance. As an example, the claim in Christianity by our Lord Jesus Christ is a clear-cut position too strong to ignore. 'I am the way, the truth and the life, nobody can get to the Father (God) except through me (John 14:6) and the view in Hebrews 1:1-4-14 (----- God in this last day has spoken to us through His Son who is the express image of His Person) are some of the very strong credence of Christianity as a religion though Jesus Christ Himself did not institute Christianity as a religion but the lifestyle of His followers after His ascension to heaven made the society of the gentiles (non- Christians) to name them Christians (Acts 11:26). Other religious practices also do claim their own sources of revelation as well which could be angelic visitation, dreams, visions, trance, and many others but the degree of reliability of such will be a function of direct inter-connectivity with The Divine Himself.

Let us use a simple linear equation to explain this as follows;

$$\text{GDDIRP} = \text{GDIRP} \text{ ----- eq.1}$$

$$\text{GDIRP} = f(\text{Iv, Id, T, M, Agv ----- n}) \text{ ----- eq.2}$$

Whereby;

GDDIRP = God Divinely Directly Inspired Religious Practice

GDIRP = God Divinely Inspired Religious Practice

Iv = Inspired Vision

Id = Inspired Dream

T = Trance

M = Meditation

Agv = Angelic Visitation

n^t = Other means or avenues

The strongest pedestal to birth a religion that will be close to what The Divine Himself want will be seen in the equation with no interference at all but a direct equality to the source (for instance in John 10;30, we have I and The Father are One or in verse 38b of the same Chapter, I am in the Father and Father is in Me) which is eq.1.

At this juncture, we can safely say that Nigeria is greatly endowed in religious practices of different kinds which can be categorized mainly into Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religions (TRs) which also have so many sub-groups and divisions. The atheists or free thinkers are extremely few in percentage and so the view in some globally acknowledged sources that Nigerians are the most religious people on earth is not necessarily out of order though the degree to which these religious practices and believes are having positive influences on our lives still leave so much to be desired and so we are also labelled as ungodly people since we seem not to practice what we profess which is very paradoxical.

Religion, Ethical Standards and Nigeria's Democracy

According to the Langenscheidt's Universal Dictionaries (The Universal Webster) (1958), Religion is explained as 'search for and recognition of superhuman power controlling the Universe. It is a system of faith in and worship of such power.' In the Blackie's Standard Dictionary (1956), religion is explained to mean acknowledgement of our obligation to God (The Supreme Being; A Divinity; A Deity), practical piety, devotion and any system of faith and worship. In the same vein, according to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, 7th Edition; (2005), religion is the belief in the existence of a god, gods or God and the activities that relate to the worship. It is also depicted as a particular interest or influence that is very important in one's life. Not believing in the existence of God is atheism which is very strange to the Nigerian ethnic societies and Nigerians as a whole. Even some well acclaimed global literatures referred to Nigerians as the most religious people on earth though our degree of godliness is what remains contestable.

In synopsis therefore and as stated initially, religion to us as Nigerians is the total summation of believes in the supreme God though gods are also noted in some cases or personalities of intermediation between the people (believers) and the supreme being. These religious are characterized by mode and items of worship, believes, doctrines, rules, practices, faith and ultimately, reward or repercussions that transcends to the hereafter or eternity whether in peace and tranquility (heaven or paradise) or a place of torment and suffering (hell). To Nigerians therefore, religion is not a joke.

As regard ethnicism, the connection or belonging to a nation, race or people who share similar cultural traditions like language, believes, historical origin, values and norms among others is said to be ethnic groupings (Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary; 2005). Nigeria as a Federation is a multi-ethnic, heterogeneous, multi-lingua and multi-religious society with ethnic groups conservatively estimated to be more than 300 though some ethnic groups are tagged major or dominant ethnic groups. Ethnicism is therefore a characterization of the Nigerian Society, Nigerians and consequently embedded in this, is the belief in the existence

of God which means that to every ethnic group in Nigeria, there is the awareness of the existence of God and His worship is acknowledged though the degree to which we exhibit the belief in the supreme being (God) to moderate and shape our society is what still remain controversial given the high rate of crimes, criminality and other nefarious activities in the societies across the country.

Also critical to this discussion is ethical standards and our society. Ethics talks about moral principles that controls or influence a person's behaviour. It is connected to believes and principles about what is right or wrong, morally correct and acceptable without necessarily any form of religious undertone. It is predicated on the fact that everybody desires what is good and abhors what is bad which should therefore be replicated by all and across to others irrespective of divides. The simple twist to this therefore is that people that claim and accept religion which is the believe in the supreme being (God) and His rules and regulations like Nigerians across our societies should also be ethically sound with high ethical standards, piety, decorum and good attitude which suppose to transcend and manifest in our body politics, government, governance and our democratic systems and practices as well as general lifestyles.

Democracy and Nigeria Democratic System

Generally, today and across the globe, the celebrated and acclaimed system of government and governance is the democratic government which in the literature means a government put in place by the people through free and fair general elections which they also have power to change periodically according to the country's constitution. Such elections are conducted by the independent electoral commission duly constituted according to the enabling laws.

Nigeria's democratic experience is in two divides: the precolonial and post-colonial or independence experience. The precolonial initially was the fusion of the traditional ethnic groups systems and methods of governance and government with that of the colonial government. For instance, there was the Yoruba pre-colonial society with the 'Oba' (King) like the 'Alaafin' who rules with the 'Oyo Meesis' (the Chieftains headed by the Bashorun who was the Prime Minister). Separation of power was relative with strong check and balances. Though the people were not 'voting', the system still recognized the importance of their approval to governance. The others in the structure of governance were the 'Baales' (Village heads), 'Bales' (Family heads) and the 'Ogbonis' (secret courts). For the Ibo pre-colonial society, which was tagged republican in its structure, there was the Council of elders headed by the most elderly person who presided over the affairs of the community assisted by the age grades members while decisions were taken communally. In the Hausa-Fulani pre-colonial society, power was more concentrated in the hands of the Emir though assisted by other title holders like the Waziri (The Prime Minister), Galadima (head of the army/security), Sarkin Powa and Sarkin Ruwa (head of butchers and head of fishermen) among others. It was this system of government that made Lord Lugard to introduce indirect rule system of government in the country to replace the direct rule system of the traditional native rulers though we should remember that the indirect rule system ended up a success in the north, partially a success in the west but a big failure in the east however, local government system as known today in our federalism started as far back as at 1900 through the indirect rule system. As of 1914 when the northern and southern protectorates were amalgamated and Nigeria as at today emerged, in 1922 through Clifford Constitution, elective principles was

introduced into the country where for the first time, though not based on universal adult suffrage system but income (200 naira or 100 pounds), the people had the opportunity to vote for the candidate of their choice in the elections. The 1946 Richards Constitution deepens the people's participation in government and election by expanding the number of seats to be voted into, the positions and the numbers of people to be elected to office and areas covered. There was also reduction in the income suffrage requirement to 100 naira or 50 pounds which gave opportunity to more people to be able to exercise the voting right.

In 1951, the Macpherson Constitution, aside sustaining and improving the inherited elective principles laid the foundation of Nigeria's Federalism through regionalism governments which was further strengthened by the 1956 Lyttleton Constitution and eventually, the Independence Constitution of 1960. Here, there were political parties, elective positions across the Central and the Regional Governments and the people voted for the candidates of their choice.

Though Nigeria's democratic governments suffered setbacks through military governments incursion into civil rulership in the country in series of coups; January 15, 1966 (the first coup with Agui Ironsi becoming the first Head of State), 22nd July 1966 (counter coup with Yakubu Gowon as the new Head of State) then in 1975 when Murtala Muhammed assumed office. There was a failed coup in 1976 and in 1979, Nigeria returned to civilian government in the 2nd Republic with Sheu Usman Aliyu Shagari as the Country's first executive President under Presidential system of government after the 1st Republic from 1960 to 1966 when we practiced Parliamentary or Westminster government of dual leadership (President and Prime Minister). The Prime Minister was Tafawa Balewa while Nnamdi Azikiwe was initially the Governor General taking over from Sir James Robertson who was the last white Governor General of the Country. In 1963, Azikiwe became the Substantive President following the Country's adoption of a Republican Constitution.

The 3rd Republic was Babangida's transition to civilian government, which was terminated with the annulment of June 12, 1993, elections acclaimed to have been won by late MKO Abiola. The 4th Republic started in 1999 and till date, being sustained till now and so Nigeria's longest democratic government in practice.

It could therefore be said that democratic system of government though gradually, has come of age in Nigeria through a lot of challenges but no doubt, still being sustained against all odds. The tell-tale signs of democratic governments are in place in the country and still being nurtured like the independent electoral commission, political parties, a written Constitution still being reviewed among others with a Judicial Arm of Government that has been granted financial autonomy to enhance the independence and consequently, fairness, equity and justice in the dispensation of their constitutional responsibility of interpreting and adjudicating the law headed by the Chief Justice of the Federation and has been helping in the aspect of constitutionalism and the rule of law which are necessary in sustaining democratic governments.

The salient truth however as regards this paper at this juncture is that for a country that claim to be religious and know God, our ethical standard ought to have been such that would have enhanced and promote greatly our practices in government and governance and as an example, our democratic system of government and the values even to dividend of democracy to the populace (Nigerians). But unfortunately, this is not very much so.

The Place of Ethical Standards and Values in Nigeria's Democratic System of Government and Practices.

The goal of democratic government is not just to say 'government of the people by the people and for the people' according to the one-time president of the United States of America (Abraham Lincoln) but as largely been said in today's Nigeria, to extend the 'dividend of democracy' to the larger proportion of the populace. This is in terms of good standard of living, thriving health care system, reduced poverty index among others but none of these can be achieved where ethical standards are not regarded.

As at today since Nigeria returned to civil rulership in 1999, to many Nigerians, there is not so much to show for our democratic government though to some others, all the challenges are parts of the learning curves. The fact the country still ranks among the highest in the corruption index of transparency international is completely 'anti' to our level of religiosity and claim of believe in the supreme God aside ethical requirements that are autonomous to any religious believes or affiliation. People who claim to know God who is known to be holy, just, righteous and fair should in addition to ethical standards be above board in all things which unfortunately is not the case in Nigeria. Nefarious activities like banditry, kidnapping, ritual killings, mismanagement of public funds for selfish and personal gains seems to have gone above the roof top under our democratic governments and aside the fact that the judiciary which is referred to as the last hope of the common man is sometimes seen to fall below expectations while some of the judicial officers themselves have being pinpointed in acts of corruption and miscarriages of justice.

The Social Entrepreneurship and Reengineering Approach

To the Issue

Entrepreneurship firstly as a concept do have many connotations in the literature. As far back as 1730, Richard Cantillon described in practically four dimensions what entrepreneurship presupposes in terms of aspirations to meet needs in the society, bringing resources together (human and material), taking decisions, management and bearing the risks involved (calculated risks) to make profits. J.B. Say and Schumpeter positing differently in the 1930s added the dimension of Psycho-social perspectives to the initial views of entrepreneurship which is entrepreneurs being people who are ready to better the lots of the society and so see problems as opportunities waiting to be explored, stumbling blocks as stepping stone which aligns with the social reengineering concept this paper has considered so as to make Nigerians religious views to align with the democratic and social values development as well as ratings.

Social entrepreneurship therefore is all about those activities engendering bringing resources together to address societal challenges and problems or to improve the existing good practices the more while still correcting the wrong ones. Many private individuals, organizations and groups are known to be involved in social entrepreneurial activities of various kinds in Nigeria already like in education scholarship for indigent students, healthcare matters, senior citizens and the aged, areas of infrastructure among others which

some religious bodies are equally into. The main problem however is that we should still be able to do more and even better given our so called religious believes, ratings and practices. The high degree of atrocious conducts in Nigeria in form of ritualism and ritual killings even in the name of religion, kidnapping, rapping, sharp practices of different kinds and so on contrast with our religious believes status which must be corrected through social reengineering advocacy under social entrepreneurship. According to Laosebikan (2005) quoting Schadler (1986), there are '6Rs' of reengineering which is a mechanism of overhauling completely, a system to make it perform better. Some of what it entails are retooling, reinvigorating, reinventing, remodeling, reconceptualizing among others. In the areas of religious practices therefore in relation to ethical standards and requirements given the practices of our democracy and democratic structures in Nigeria, the approach of social entrepreneurship given reengineering perspectives may be necessary to correct our social ills despite our religious ratings and to evolve a better society where more of dividend of democracy can be produced the more for the populace.

The Paper's Research Methodology Approach

This paper is simply a descriptive survey research done as an exploratory work and as a position paper in a qualitative manner focusing so much on the so-called critical indicators of dividend of democracy since Nigeria returned to civil rulership in 1999 and given our religious inclination as a country, how far have faired and is there anything to be proud of? What are the ways out given need for ethical remodeling of the society through the concept of social reengineering through social entrepreneurial activities?

The Critical Research Questions

- i. What is the degree of religious practices as at today in Nigeria?
- ii. What has been the impact of the various religious believes on the ratings of ethical standards in the country for instance, crime rates in Nigeria, the various dimensions and forms, corruption, and sharp practices as well as other social ills?
- iii. Given the concept of dividend of democracy, since the country returned to civil rulership in 1999, how have we faired as a Nation in social indices and indicators like corruption index, crime rate, poverty index, level and standard of education (out of school children as an example and illiteracy level in the country), healthcare standard and facilities (accessibility and life expectancy), calorie intake and general conditions of living with level of infrastructural facilities, employment among others?

Answers to Research Questions and Discussions

For Research Question One, according to Ute sati (2020) in Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, it was discovered that religions in Nigeria have been turned to commercial ventures, avenue for personal enrichment, instrument of social disunity and divisions, tool being used to destroy human lives and properties. It further identified regional, political, religious, and ethnic divisions and conflicts in Nigeria as effects of abuse of religion especially in Islam and Christianity. It was therefore opined that the adherents must live by the ethical teachings of their religions. Though it was said that religion has helped in developing Nigeria in

some areas like education, language, peace and reconciliation advocacy, provision of some basic social and infrastructural facilities and services, educational materials and other necessary inputs like science and technological items, classrooms and laboratories, sickbays among others, it has equally been found to have negated those good deeds through many other vices such as religious intolerance, religious conflicts of different magnitudes, moral bankruptcy, crazy for wealth and 'prosperity preachings' without dignity of labour and work, preferential treatments further engendering inequality in the society that is some people because of their wealth and positions, irrespective of the ways they acquire the wealth and position are treated highly than others less privileged members who might actually be pious, hardworking, committed worshippers among others but without 'money' and power (position).

In Research Question Two, though religion suppose to be an agent of social order, teaching of moral behaviour for people to be good members of the society, the opposite seems to be the case in Nigeria where increase in various religious activities has not abated or reduce crimes and criminality rates in the country compared to other countries across the globe not highly rated in religious practices as Nigeria. Some of these atrocious conducts are even perpetuated at the doorsteps of the various religious groups. In a report on Google Search Engine (2023), it was reported that Nigeria has recently been included among the Countries with the least peace in the World according to Global Peace Index where the Country was ranked 18th less peaceful state in the World which lay credence to the 29 March 2018 Inaugural Lecture at OOU, Agowoye titled 'A Religious but Criminal Society-Any Remedy? (oouagoiwoye.edu.ng>inaug).

Finally for Research Question Three in terms of social indices and indicators given for instance, dividend of democracy to the populace, the result is a far cry to the expected. There is high unemployment in the land which in addition to hyperinflation has resulted into stagflation, corruption which is still on the increase with high poverty index, many out-of-schoolchildren and growing level of illiteracy, poor healthcare services and delivery, low calorie intake, unstable industrial and employment relations, near collapse of social facilities as well as worsening crime rate which is assuming new dimensions every day. The idea is simply that despite our religious inclinations, ethical standard and correlated with our current level and form of democratic system, where still not yet there and so social reengineering will therefore be needed through social entrepreneurial activities to make the country an enviable nation in the committee of States across the globe.

Conclusion

So far in this paper and given Nigeria as a country, an important issue has been examined in relation to the country's quest for growth, stability and development which religion, ethical standards, our democratic structure and democracy as well as the social reengineering concept through social entrepreneurship can and should help to correct the misdemeanors. It is however important that this

submission should be noted and adhered to which is that we should be weary of this Christopher Hitchens submission in Goodreads (2023) that ‘we keep on being told that religion, whatever its imperfections at least instill morality. However, on every side (he opined), there is the conclusive evidence that the contrary is the case (like in Nigeria) where the faith and believes of the people is causing them to be more mean, more selfish and perhaps above all, more stupid which social reengineering under social entrepreneurship will have to constantly correct and remind the people through advocacy of the right ethical standards.

Refences

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