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RELIGION AND THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY: A MORAL MAXIM

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Abstract

It is pertinent to state that in human history, religion is the keystone of the people's lives and culture. No doubt, it builds and maintains human society. Also, economic index reads the indices of economic situation of a country which in a way reflects the increase or decrease in Gross Domestic Product. However, in Nigerian economy, there is nothing to write home about as a result of economy instability, hyper-inflation and policy somersault. In contemporary Nigerian society, there are obvious signs of decay and extinction in all facets of life. The paper however postulates that moral variables such as prudence, accountability, responsibility, commitment and among others are the catalysts or panacea to economic growth in Nigeria.

Keywords: Culture, Religion, Economy, Morality

Introduction

Every human age clamours for issues deigned for contemporary discourse. At this threshold of the 21st century, the greatest challenge to Nigerian economy is perhaps the economic responsibility of the leaders towards demonstrating and searching for economic growth and stability for the masses. The economic problems and their implications in terms of social development and operational authenticity call for religious cum moral questions. The central role occupied by religion in human life and discourse is attested to by its affinity to many academic courses of which economics is not out of place. It is in this context, that we shall attempt to explore religion and Nigerian economy of which ethical variables would be employed as a paradigm for economic problems in the contemporary Nigeria.

Religion: An Overview

In all ages, religion has come to grips with the existence of all human endeavours. Religion at all times plays pivotal role in shaping the thought,

perception, approach, feeling and history of humankind. Thus, religion embraces all aspects of life and it represents wholeness of all existence and, as well, is life itself. Apparently, religion is the keystone or cornerstone of the people's lives and cultures. Religion is far more than a believing way of life in the Nigerian context, where distinction or separation is not made between religion and other areas of human existence. It serves the aim of building and maintaining human society. No doubt, with its consciousness and sensitivity, there is no known society that exists without a religion. Dopamu (2005, pp. 1) is apposite when he states that there is no known society without the existence of religion. In line with the above position of Dopamu, Abe (2004, pp. 3) argues that religion is the provenance and consummation of all things. According to him, "in the beginning, it was religion; and in the end it shall be religion." In fact, religion has explained the world and human understanding of it. Without equivocation, religion has been explained by a gamut of scholars like Kenny, Keqley, Ejiofor, and so on. However, their explanations seem to defy the satisfactory quest for a universally acceptable definition. Yet, new definition is not offered either. It is most appreciative to examine their relevance hereunder.

Kenny (1999, pp. 10) cited by Ayantayo (2002, pp. 4) aptly describes Religion "as any system which relates men to ultimate values, whether God or something else and which embodies a creed, a code and a cult." In another development, Keqley as cited by Ayantayo (2002, pp. 6) distinguishes three basic features of religion as belief, feeling and action. It is imperative to note that what is pivotal to religion is belief in God or gods. On the basis of this, we come to appreciate the fact that religion does not only command loyalty but also gives its adherents something they are glad to live for and if need be, die for... In the same vein, Ejiofor (1974, pp. 63) also attests to the fact that:

Religion is the complex of beliefs and behaviour of men in the supernatural sphere and realities and in the dynamic linkage of supernatural with the natural... Religion is one major drive behind human behaviour. Religion has had an important disciplinary effect on the whole social order in any given civilization.

The above shows that religion is a very significant factor in the lives of men. In point of fact, religion identifies itself with the first instinct for

self-preservation. "Men take off from religion, men march along with religion and they arrive at religion with a minute-to-minute phenomenon." Ejiofor (1974) further buttresses that religion is:

The pride of the mind, the strength of the will, the relish of human emotions, coveted object of delicate sentimentality... In short, it is the comprehensive resume of man's spiritual, rational and corporate existence (p.65).

The above definitions reveal certain essential elements as relating to religion in Nigeria. Thus, the concept of God, gods, relationship of man to ultimate values, a creed, a code, a cult, belief, action, feeling, super sensible world, law and social order, the relish of human emotions, and the pride of the mind are indispensable to religion in Nigeria. Perhaps, in all things, Nigerians are religious (Idowu, 1996: pp.1).

As sensitive as religion is, it is worth living for, a pride of place for people as they subsequently derive satisfaction and security from it. In Nigeria, there is the practice of triadic religions of African Religion (Afrel), Islam and Christianity. Thus, the history of African Religion is Indigenous Religion which is as old as the people themselves. It is a religion handed down by our forebears from the yore, and it is orally transmitted from one generation to another. It does not possess sacred scriptures, yet, it is thus written in memory of the very world we live and transmit orally as the occasion demands. This is not proselytizing religion, nor does it have a drive for membership, yet it is tolerant, it accommodates and remains autochthonous. Therefore, we are born into it, live in it and die in it (Awolalu & Dopamu 2005, pp.12). Commenting on the overview of African Religion, Dopamu (2005, pp.3) has this to say:

This is clearly seen in African Religion (Afrel), which encompasses all aspects of life. Africans do not know how to live without religion. They celebrate life religiously and they never embark on anything without bringing in religion. Thus at birth, marriage, death, warfare, healing, the foundation of any project, planting, harvesting, enthronement of chiefs and kings and other areas of human endeavour, Afrel plays important roles.

This indigenous and religious communality of Nigeria gave rise to the acceptability of Islam and Christianity when they arrived in Nigeria. Nigeria creates a new environment till date for global sharing of which its tradition is 'live and let live' which enhances peaceful co-existence in the religious tradition. It is germane to state that indigenous religion embraced, tolerated and still embraces and tolerates the proselytizing religions of Islam and Christianity. Dopamu (2006) consistently maintains that:

Afrel (Indigenous religion) has maintained a long history of co-operative interaction with Christianity and Islam in Africa. In the face of ever-troublesome and discouraging history of contact between Afrel and the imported religions, Afrel was able to exercise itself in the style of activity for which it has existed from time immemorial (p.30).

Islam and Christianity are the proselytizing religions, imported into Nigeria. Thus, Islam was introduced into Nigeria in the 11th century by the Timbuktu traders who had contact or encounter with the Northerners. Gbadamosi's position has been diametrically opposed that Islam penetrated Nigeria in the 9th century. However, this latter claim does not enjoy wide acceptability. Popular submission is on the 11th century when Kanem-Borno Empire was still formidable. In the 19th century, to be precise, 1804, a jihad was carried out in the North by Uthman Dan Fodio. Nevertheless, Islam still enjoys wide acceptability in the North than in the South-West. However, Gbadamosi (1978, pp.33) asserts that it was in the 16th century that Islam spread to the South-West. Today, Islam as a religion or a way of life is enjoying popularity in the North. Here, it must be emphasized that Islam has many sects like Christianity. It was in the 16th century that Islam spread to the South-West.

Christianity penetrated into Nigeria in the 16th century through Benin and Warri. As a matter of fact, the Catholic Holy Ghost Fathers who pioneered the missionary activities only confined themselves to the palace of the Kings. This was so because they believed that African Kings were despotic and as such they could coerce their subjects in accepting anything. Thus, this wrong notion contributed to the limitedness of their propagation to the palace. In fact, Erivwo (1978, pp. 97) refers to this first attempt at

Christianizing Nigeria as 'palace religion'. However, this first attempt to Christianize Nigeria failed due to many factors, such as language barrier, harsh weather, the missionary's ignorance of African worldview such as honour-taking, witchcraft, sorcery, chieftaincy title and so on. Be that as it may, Christianity came to be planted permanently in the 19th century with different denominations. Thus, the planting of Christianity in Nigeria in the 19th century was further helped by the 'act of parliament' passed in 1789 in England to abolish slave trade at the source-Africa hinterland. By 1841, Niger expedition was embarked upon and Samuel Ajayi Crowther was in the company. Though some of the missionaries also lost their lives in the process, while some traditional rulers were asked to sign treaties on the abolition of slave trade, i.e. King Kosoko of Lagos. The free-slaves then settled in Sierra-leone and Freetown, some of which later sent for foreign missionaries to come to Africa to evangelize because they believed that they were in the dark. In 1837, Ferguson, a Mulatto, sent for Thomas Birch Freeman of the Methodist Church to come to Badagry. From there, they landed in Abeokuta and they were warmly received by King Shodeke. In 1842, Christianity had reached Abeokuta. In 1846, Henry Townsend of the Anglican Communion with David Hinderer and Samuel Ajayi Crowther penetrated Abeokuta. Thus, Abeokuta has become the gateway or sunrise within the tropics. In 1851, David Hinderer had penetrated Ibadan, In 1870, Charles Philip had reached Ilesa. By 1877, Charles Philip had penetrated Ondo. Congregational had reached old Calabar, while in the East, Catholic Communion had taken hold on the people. The North was later reached by some missionaries. Christianity came with multifarious denominations.

Islam and Christianity have had disproportionate size. Interestingly therefore, Nigeria is a secular and pluralistic state without any particular religion being a state religion. There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is a country of diverse cultures, traditions and beliefs. But of the entire diverse elements, religion has proved to be a most sensitive agent in the society. It is this fact about religion that has made it an instrument of peace, unifying factor as well as social mechanism for national development. Truly, the tenets of religion provide individuals with shared values, roles and incumbents, altruism and responsibilities. Religion aims at transforming individual life. Thus, individual life is a means of microcosmic structure in the overall macrocosmic structure of the society. Apart from this, "each of the patterns of life and practice presupposes a structure of shared beliefs.

When the credibility of central religious beliefs is questioned, other aspects of religion are also challenged." Tersely, therefore, religion is recognised as a channel for personal and national development as well as legal instrument. Idowu (1996, pp.4) becomes apposite when he states that religion is the keystone of the people's lives:

Religion forms the foundation and all-governing principle of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity; their own part in the matter is to do as they are ordered through the priests and diviners whom they believe to be interpreters of the will of the deity. Through all the circumstances of life, through all its changing scenes, its joys and troubles, it is the Deity who is in control.

Without fuss, religion has all-governing principles of life and infuses discipline and social order. Thus, religion is a cord that binds people together in order to promote social cohesion and communal well-being. As the rule of law is machinery set in place to guide the conduct of the people so also is religion both a social and a legal mechanism for harmonious living and co-existence. Besides, religion is a divine law or mechanism that regulates human conduct and as well institutionalises social norms in human society. Religion has the knack of bringing people together where they can experience presently what it means to live the full human life. It is also a major instrument of transforming any human society into a community that acts justly. To this end, religion becomes the law of life, pathway to God-realization, absolute value truth, living power, justice, and morality.

Appraising the Nigerian Economy

With regard to the Nigerian economy, it implies that every economic system takes care of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Every economic system is tied to a political system through which the people decide what their society desires. A vital role of any economic system is co-ordination. It must see that the individuals' decisions about what they do are co-ordinated with what the society wants and what other individuals do (Ehinmore 2006, pp.164). Prior to this co-ordination, it was widely believed that these liberalization efforts would bring substantial benefits by enhancing

the efficiency of the economic sector, especially in terms of allocating resources toward the most productive investment projects. The positive effects on the economy include the long-run rate of economic growth and the volume or efficiency of investment.

However, the recent economic trend in Nigeria is nothing to cheer about because of economic instability, hyper-inflation and policy somersault. In the contemporary Nigerian society, there are obvious signs of decay and extinction. Nigeria parades severe economic crisis, increased poverty and continuous marginalization of the masses. In fact, it is a history of economic policies that has yielded limited successes. Instead of experiencing economic development as a nation, the opposite becomes the case. It also means deficiency in per capita income of a country; deficiency or deficit in economic output of a country, low flight in the standard of living of the people. The per capita income decreases the national income per year as divided by the population. Therefore, economic morass is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which involves many negative and excruciating changes that lead to reduction and suffering in the quality of life of the people of Nigeria.

However, Dudley Seers (1969, pp.3) sees development in terms of a reduction in four variables- poverty, unemployment, waste of resources and inequality. Supporting Dudley Seers, Todare (1997, pp.96) writes

Development must therefore be conceived of as a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty.

In the case of Nigerian economy, there is the case of inflation in the three variables – poverty, unemployment and coupled with the reduction of economic growth and increase in absolute poverty. It is certainly apparent that economic problem in Nigeria is multi-dimensional in nature. There are inequitable distributions of income, negative changes in the structural composition of national income by output. There are problems in traditional institutions, beliefs and practices to contemporary ones and lack of democratization of the decision-making process (Todare, 1997, pp.97). All these negative changes translate to deregulate people. Certainly, Nigeria has

been witnessing the above mentioned variables. Poverty, for instance, is the state of being poor; the state of existing in amount that are too small, lack, the state of being inferior and poor quality (Akanmidu 1995, pp.44). In addition, the concept of poverty depicts starvation, destitution, hunger, suffering, among others. These are the nexus to admit that the word "poverty" itself is a form of human suffering and in its true sense, is the state of lacking the means to exist adequately (Akanmidu, 1995, pp.45). These sufferings are the imports of poverty. In essence, Akanmidu (1995, pp.47) buttresses further that:

The impossibility of denying this point links with the view that to say that somebody or a country is poverty-stricken is a clear admission that the person or the country is going through all forms of sufferings, e.g. Inadequate supply of food, lack of good housing system.

It is sad to note that poverty in Nigeria is dismal with a per capita growth of less than 1 percent per year in the last decade. After all, the picture of poverty is gloomy as the attendant consequences upon the populace are severe. Interestingly, the Nigerian economy is further bastardised by corrupt-minded leaders in the society. Ehusani (2002, pp.152) is apposite when he writes that "elect" of the system has squandered the resources of the nation. According to him,

Our past has seen a monumental waste in resources and steady flight of human development... and an entrenchment of economic hardship now taken for granted and taken as normal.

The foregoing reveals that even the blind and deaf can see and hear the ominous quiet of unbearable angst in the land. Marshal Sahlins (1974, pp.59) gives an overview of the state of the poor;

One-third to one-half of humanity are said to go to bed hungry every night.... This is the era of hunger unprecedented.

Poverty to human experience bears thumb-up print and causes underutilization of resources.

Another aspect of the nation's socio-economic problem is the issue of unemployment. Unemployment among the youth is a global problem. The provisional census report of 2006 reveals that Nigeria has a youth population of about 70 to 80 million, accounting for about 50 to 60% of the total population. Unemployment rate in Nigeria increased from 18.4% in 2000 to 30.2% in 2005 with regional variations of 27.6% in 2005 (Ifamose 2010, pp.406). As a matter of fact, unemployment has systematically ignored the human person and alienated the average Nigerian. The number of Nigerians out of work or who cannot find employment is higher now than at any time in our national history. The more alarming in the case of unemployment is the number of university graduates who cannot secure jobs. The adverse effect of this alarming rate is the fact that higher education is becoming less attractive to the teeming youth. Sending children to school undoubtedly at all is a question mark in the minds of guardians and parents (Newswatch 1990, pp.55). Besides, the aftermath of this unemployment includes social unrest, tremendous increase in the rate of criminal and anti-social activities such as robbery, prostitution, thuggery, drug and human trafficking. It is capable of reducing the probability of winning the war against corruption. Right/down size has also increased the number of the unemployed.

Money has lost its value to the average wage earner. In the face of all these developments, majority of Nigerians have lost their patriotic verve and now see the nation as an oppressor (Newswatch 1990, pp.56). Even wages and salaries cannot service the needs of the earners. Sired by this lack of money, many factories and even conglomerates are being shut down and their corresponding effects are the poor payment. Inequity of distribution of resources has been the product of capitalism. Nigeria is exhibiting all the cruelties of capitalism and it is more apparent that there is a loss of affection for the nation due to the failure to convert some people's many sacrifices into basic rewards. To this end, no one is compelled to say that crass underdevelopment has manifested all the traits of "advanced capitalist states. Those who talk about the final triumph of capitalism must take another look at history"(p.56). Indeed, the starving multitudes are in want of the basic necessities of life.

In fact, the Marxian concept of alienation based on human necessities bears great relevance to the time in which we live in Nigeria. It

relates to the structure of the society in which the producers are detached from the means of production and in which workers are also alienated from the means of production (Newswatch, 1996, p p.57). Economic and moral laxity in Nigeria have been summarised by Nnimo Bassey in Newswatch (1990, pp.57) when he states that Nigeria is a movie.

Nigeria is a movie; a saga in abandoned babies, abandoned projects, abandoned responsibilities, abandoned economy; abandoned you and me.

The widespread of social apathy and economic despondence have acquired a state of a virtue. Greed, grafts of lies and subterfuge promoted a generation that is almost fully surrendered to the mundane, where progress is defined along the parameter of the moment (The Guardians, 1999, pp.65).

By and large, we tend to be mindlessly regressing to the Hobbesian state of nature, everyone living for himself or herself, selfish, brutish, lawless, reckless and bloody. Indeed, we have so regressed that today students can abduct and beat up their teachers, principals, rectors, and vice-chancellors and no one shrugs the shoulder (p.66). Therefore, we are producing a generation of Nigerians whose current vocabulary begins with such words as scarcity, riots, consensus, cults, coup, fraud, execution, rigging, adoption, fire, blackout, exile, prison, detention, boycott, kickback, these words are negative by implication (p.67).

Tersely therefore, these negative words amount to grossly insensitivity and gross immorality and discipline of the worst order. The unflattering and uncheering antecedents of our economy have met with sharp resistant. And before now, it would be impossible to survive the public sector even in terms of salaries and wages. Therefore, fiscal innovations are suspects as nothing is special in regulations as it is worthless to create the illusion of cash flow (The Guardians, 1996, p.67). It is mind boggling to note that majority of the masses cannot afford essential goods and services. Therefore, Aloy Ejiogu (2000, pp.22) has this to say:

We do not need a diviner to tell us that national development cannot be achieved in a country that extorts or at best resigns itself to act of immorality, the likes of which have just been identified. No investment for development can work in a

place where the policy-makers and the implementers are not morally committed.

We must bear in mind that the effects of all governments' policies in ensuring that there is stability and growth and accompanying economic measures have been devastating on the economy as well as on the masses. Aggregate demand has been falling presently and there is the drift in inflation. Capacity utilization of industries has consistently been falling until it gets to its current below thirty percent. Unemployment has assumed dangerous dimensions. It has corced the government into panic with the setting up the of National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and Poverty Eradication Programmes. All these are targeted towards eliminating poverty, unemployment and ensuring job opportunities to job seekers. Interestingly, the common man is finding it increasingly difficult to feed, clothe and house himself. All these are happening in the midst of vast natural and human resources (Akinbi, 1999, pp.104). Even the GDP is constantly falling. Summarily, the country has suffered reverses in terms of economic development in the last two decades. The problems are offshoots of economic mismanagement and inconsistent government policies. (p.107). What could be seen of Nigeria is decay in economic structure, collapse of the productive sector, unemployment and wide-spread poverty. This is an obvious demonstration of governments' inability to mobilize national resources for broad-based economic growth. In fact, all these economic problems are essentially moral ones. Therefore, Nigerian economy needs a moral surgery.

A Moral Reconsideration to Nigerian Economy

From the economic life of Nigerians, it is apparent that the masses are being denied access to basic life and material resources. This is necessitated by lack of morality. Morality deals with the normative science of good and bad, right and wrong of an action amidst variables or alternatives. Thus, moral issue arises only because human nature is permissive to some forms of conduct. Morality exists in concept in order to better the lot of human well-being. Therefore, any moral concept that does not attend to the welfarist proportion of man does not merit to be classified under morality. This position accounts for the fact that moral concept starts with the individual and reflects on others.

Thus, some of the moral variables needed for economic growth and stability include: virtue, prudence, kind-heartedness, human-heartedness, responsibility, commitment, accountability, among others. Human-heartedness and kind-heartedness are moral virtues mostly necessary for one to effectively perform one's duties in the society. This virtue is a special one and it embraces or accommodates all the others. It is the perfection and summation of all the virtues. A kind-hearted man is a noble man who possesses a good virtue that enables him to live a good life in the society. This virtuous man is clothed with fidelity, diligence, modesty, generosity, patriotism and filial piety.

Responsibility in this context means duty, accountability and obligation. Therefore, economic responsibility attempts to see that there is sense of duty to economic variables such as economic growth, reduction of inequality, eradication of absolute poverty and unemployment. This economic responsibility is channelled towards even allocation or distribution of available resources whereby all the chains of production are evenly affected. Economic responsibility in effect involves all stakeholders in the allocation of scarce resources by identifying with the resources, distributing the resources and utilizing the resources (Ayantayo, 2002, pp.22). The even distribution of all raw materials from the explorers to the consumers who are in the last chains of production is the watchword of economic responsibility.

Devotion to duty can help the generality of Nigerians especially those in public leadership positions, who imbibe the doctrine of the universal imperative to love others with deep convictions, zest and devotion to duty and practise these as personal ethics in all their human relations. As they carry these into their places of work, there will be good governance. In a nutshell, the essentials of good government are sufficient food, and the confidence of the people. In other words, the people speak out boldly and act boldly. (TELL, 2003, pp.41). The sense of devotion brings about patriotism. In fact, some people still chant the classical mantra of patriotism. Ehusani (2002, pp.92) notes with trustworthiness the essence of patriotism. According to him;

A true patriot will always demand the highest standards of his country and accept nothing but the best for and from his people. He will be outspoken in condemnation of their

shortcomings without giving way to superiority, despair or cynicism.

Sequel to the above, patriotism is the only salt that never loses its flavour, but endures itself. Thus, the society can crumble or collapse outside morality. Besides, economic organizations go beyond the scope of the individual establishment to foster mutual aid and cheap credit to the communities. Apart from that, commercial management of the resources of the economy ought to be checkmated with close surveillance so that the output should be evenly distributed according to special commercial services. Similar effort ought to be made especially to facilitate and sustain of the slack period in seasonal industries in order to eliminate "bad man theory" and of course, to facilitate credit in the specialization of productive work (Callahan, 1988, pp.71). These are the way of establishing large economic units and monitoring them which will in their social and democratic aspects discourage class distinction between the commoners and the capitalist vampires.

Ameliorating poverty, inequality, unemployment, among others, of the masses are the fundamental goals of the leaders. By extension, it is apposite that individual in the society has the right to life and so needs even allocation of scarce resources. This right is basic and central to the provision of subsistence to make the exercise of others possible. A right in a broader sense involves the right to lead a meaningful, qualitative and valuable life. This idea of welfarist proportion should be provided by the government to enable it foster the total well-being of the people. Similarly, the elected officials have a duty to legislate and act for the good of their country. It can hardly be right for capitalists to frustrate them in the performance of that duty by providing them with evasive answer (p.73).

Finally, the economic reforms agenda of the government in recent times should be aimed at rolling back the state from the control of the economy as a sure means of achieving the expected end of growth and development. The expected benefits from reforms according to the neo-liberal perspective embodied in the Washington consensus included the achievement of scale economics, increased industrial specialization and labour mobilization towards activities with a comparative advantage, and increasing both employment and remuneration to labour.

Conclusion

This paper has considerably revealed religion and Nigerian economy vis-a-vis moral reconsideration. It is evident that the Nigerian economy is dwindling and unstable. For the Nigerian economy to be revamped and subsequently compete with vibrant economic environment such as the Asian world, Nigeria needs good planners, purposeful leadership, right priorities, accountability in programme implementation and stable political culture which will guarantee a good industrial climate for both local and foreign capital investment, the standard of living of the people will be enhanced. There must be a more effective control of commercial activities to ensure a more equitable allocation of goods and commodities (Nwankwo 1984, pp.59). To this end, the indices of national development should be according to Ejiogu (2000, pp.11) "health and buoyant economy; well fed population; availability and affordability of essential goods and services; high GDP and income per capita; stable polity; security of life and property; food security; viable employment opportunities; and of course, functional qualitative educational system."

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