

The Power and The Potential of Christian Religious Education as A Tool in Transforming Nigeria Economic System

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Abstract- Religion is in the heart and activity of every man, young and old. It is a common feature of every race. Religion most often is responsible for ordering and coordinating every aspect of human activity social, economic and political. It gives man confidence in the face of difficulties and uncertainties of life. In the traditional African society, religion determines the economic and social life of the people. The western and Islamic religions are not left out. Islam, for instance is essentially the total way of life of the adherent government of Nigeria has realized the moral decadence in every aspect of life in the society hence the cry for reforms. Needless to say, that the cause of all these problems was the separation of man from his creator. In the early to middle of twentieth century in Nigeria, corruption of any kind was unheard of, but today it is the order of the day. This paper explored the efforts of the government in carrying out various reform programmes and suggests ways that religious/moral education can eradicate corruption in the socio-economic life of the people. Towards this end, secondary source materials like books, journals and periodicals are employed. The paper argued that despite our religious activities in this nation, we still realize the moral decadence in every aspect of life in the society hence the cry for reforms. The findings clearly indicated that the adherents of the three principle religions in Nigeria need to exhibit good conduct. Religious education in itself therefore is the vehicle for desirable behaviour in the society. The paper adopts theological methods in carrying out the research work

Keywords: Religion, Economy, Government, Moral Decadence and Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

So many renowned scholars have given various definitions to the word religion and education. Immanuel Kant defined religion as recognition of our duties as divine commands. According to him religion is the belief, which sets what is essential in all adoration of God in human morality. Religion is the law in us, it is the morality directed to the recognition of God. In the words of Paul Tillich (1968), religion is the totality of events of phenomena, which relate man to the ultimate reality of his existence.

Education on the other hand is defined by Nwana (1981) as the process which are concerned with deliberate change in the behaviour of persons through the acquisition of desirable attitudes interests and appreciation. Education overhauls the whole person towards a desirable goal.

Religious education in itself therefore is the vehicle for desirable behaviour in the society. Religious education is the effort of religious teachers to relates the morals and values of religion to every aspect of man's behaviour in the society. The teachings found in the Holy Books are translated to human situation and are brought to bare in the human condition.

Awolola and McCaron (1986) defined religious education “as those enterprise designed to induct new generation into the attitudes, beliefs and practices of a particular faith or religion, thereby perpetuating the religion and at the same time providing for the individual a unifying centre for his life”. The unifying centre is man's link and relationship to the Ultimate Reality. Religious education seeks to communicate a systematic understanding of the religious traditions that play significant part in the moulding of the culture and civilization in which the learner is living.

Nwaehukwu (1998) observed that religious education is not just an intellectual discipline but also a practical experience where the operator sees the need for proper salvation.

Moral education on the other hand can be described as an act of teaching man, how to live a purposeful, meaningful and acceptable life to himself and others in the society. It aims at fostering harmony, peaceful co-existence and enhancing the dignity of man (Odudele 2006). Moral education tries to develop in human beings the act of national thinking and in fact a disposition to do those things that would ensure the survival of the society. Moral education trains human conscience and “teaches such values as honesty, faithfulness, love, dedication, diligence, respect, obedience, perseverance, patience and devotion” (Odudele 2006). This is to say that moral education helps man to judge his actions and decide to do what is acceptable to the society.

In the early and mid-twentieth century, moral and religious education was one of the core subjects in the school curriculum of Nigerian education. During this period Nigerian people maintained high ethical standard. The words bribery and corruption have not entered the list of Nigerian vocabulary. Cheating was unheard of, fake and adulterated drugs and parts of human body were never mentioned. In the late eighties there was removal of moral and religious education from the school curriculum and since then things gradually started falling apart for the Nigerian people. Nigerian economy, politics and even the social life of the people was not left out.

According to Adejoro (2001), Nigeria with general vibrant and active peoples and so abundant endowed with natural resources, stands out, like the delinquent Prince in the whorehouse, as the sole nation, among her peer nations, in the low human development ranking. The negative impact of corruption on the Nigeria economy can be seen easily when we recall that the pervading poverty now noticeable in the society had not been so before. Scholars observed that living standards crept gradually upwards from independence and that by late 1970's Nigerians were recorded as the 33rd richest people in the world.

It is nothing but corruption that has worsened the economic situation on Nigerians since according to

Adejoro (2001), “the zeal of the people to work and earn income for attaining, maintaining and improving upon decent living conditions has not dried up, nor diminished and the land and other natural resources have not dried up, nor has the country lately got embroiled in strife and conflict”. Whereas it is noted that there was oil glut from the 1980's, the fact remains that a substantial part of the oil proceeds were not accounted for in the normal government accounts ever since 1985.

Religion and Economic Activities In Nigeria

According to Falola and Babalola (1991), most discussion on religion and economy started with Weber's influential thesis on Protestant ethics and the rise of capitalism. According to Weber's Protestant ethics which stresses handwork, thrift and diligence was an essential factor in the early rise of capitalism in Europe and that the absence of a combination of these ideals in other parts of the world was responsible for the late start of capitalism. Meanwhile religion promotes economic enterprise in societies. Religious beliefs and practices cannot be separated from the economic and socio-political life of the Nigerian people. An X-ray of the influence of the three major religions in Nigeria on the economic life of the people will help us to understand better.

In the Nigerian Traditional Religion, people offered rituals and prayers to tackle the problems of life, to improve their earthly wellbeing and to avert the calamities of life. Even the ancestors were contacted for good life. Many aspects of religion are specifically concerned with economic life. For instance, land or the earth received a lot of attention in religious belief. For playing many functions, land was revered. Earth goddess existed in all communities of Nigeria and beyond. Great care is always taken not to offend the earth goddess, (Isaiah E. 1976) In the traditional setting, religion plays great role in production. Apart from farm work, blacksmithing and iron works were highly ritualized and are surrounded by lots of taboos.

In the Christian milieu, the European missionaries who first brought Christianity to Nigeria contributed significantly to the evolution and development of monetarized economy in the country (Ajayi 1965). The activities of these missionaries showed that evangelism and economic activity are related. The

early missionaries believed that the development of 'legitimate' trade would serve as an antidote to the Atlantic slave trade, hence they helped and encouraged the supply of raw materials to the growing industries in Britain. (Ayodele 1966). To effect and perfect this relationship between Christian faith and economic enterprise, early missionaries propagated the doctrine of the 3cs namely Christianity, Commerce and Civilization. The belief of course then was that the Bible and the plough would regenerate Africans (Buxton 1967).

The activities of the early missionaries are notable especially in the eastern and southern Nigeria. The missionaries introduced such crops as cotton, cocoa and rubber in the Southern part of the country. Falola and Babalola. (1991) quoting Berry observed that the cocoa production experiment, which began with Christian converts in Lagos, Agege and Offa soon, became a prominent feature of the economic life of the Yoruba people. Barry concluded that Christianity and cocoa offered opportunities for a better life through changes in If two kinds activities religious worship and 59 economic achievement, which were already associated with each other in Yoruba thought.

Adeniyi (1985) noted that Christian missionaries established and taught Nigerians a number of crafts and technical works such as carpentry and printing later technical and industrial training was introduced partly to satisfy critics of literary education and partly to train people to be skilled. For instance the Catholic Church established the Topo Industrial School where students were introduced to farming, shoe making and all these skills earlier mentioned. In Lagos and Ogbomoso, the Baptist mission trained some members in carpentry, brick-making, tailoring, book binding printing and building industries. The missionaries also promoted piano repairing, draught Manship, mechanic, arts and many new ventures. (Adeniyi 1985)

In the Northern part of the country, the story is all the same. Muslim traders were united by the universalism of Islam. They could employ the /Arabic Language to communicate with each other, they used Islamic laws to negotiate contracts, to settle matters and Islamic regulations affected transactions and the means to promote commerce. Trimioghamas quoted by Falola

and Babalola (1991) pointed to such new Arabic names for crops, the cultivation of certain crops for export in North Africa, the cultivation of more cotton to meet the cloth requirement of Muslims, the extensive use of slaves to support Islamic aristocracy, charges in laws of inheritance on land, economic demand on farmers to support clerics and the use of Islam to propitiate the laws which govern fertility.

Isichei (1984) noted that in Nigeria and elsewhere ttrading and Islamic expansion went hand in hand. Muslim traders from North Africa and Nigeria earned with them the visible practice of their religion wherever they went. The Wangara traders from North Africa who brought Islam to Kano and many parts of Hausa land are reported to have combined cleric roles with trading, thereby bringing about the economic transformation of the people with whom they come in contact. They helped to introduce Hausa people to massive trade network, which stretched from the middle Niger, and the Volta to Borno. Through the activities of these traders four major terminal of the trans-saharan trade routes which linked Nigeria with North Africa were established. These routes are Ngomu, Kano, Kastina, and Sokoto. Falola and Babalola (1991) pointed attenuation to the belief in charms by Muslim traders. Malams made lots of money by preparing charms for traders, soldiers and many others. Islam condoned the use of charms made with Holy sayings and names. Caravan leaders (the Madagai) were not only brave and learned they possessed magical powers as well. The Madagai and traders carried charms for protection and they relied on malams to know the moment to embark on trade expedition in order to avoid failure. Prayers were made with incessant repetitions of "we beg that Allah protect us from the pagans. Many of these prayers were written on board, washed off with water and drank with the belief that it provided protection and success was assured. Up till the present time, religion and economic activities still moved closely together. The sale of certain goods are highly patronized by both Christian and Islamic religions. Even during crusades and other Christian programmes, people come with variety of items for sale and many of them go home after the programme smiling. Those who sell religious articles are seriously making it in the area of business today. This brief survey shows how far

religion can go to enhance the success of the economic activity of any nation.

Economic Reforms in Nigeria

Reform has been a common feature of Obasanjo led government of Nigeria since inception on May 29th 1999. This clarion call for reform of course is as a result of corruption in the Nigerian system. Corruption has been so pervasive today that one is tempted to call it “the condition par excellence of contemporary Nigerian society” (Adegbulu 2001). Corruption is no longer restricted to one segment of the society. It has become an evil that exists in every face of our society, at all levels of governmental administration and also visible in the private sector. In the words of Sanni (2001) infested corrupt practices cut across board in the social economic and professional life of Nigerian citizens. For instance, the young and old even Pastors, Lawyers, teachers, students, market women, drivers, policeman and so on, have all been indicted of corruption. So pervasive is this malaise in Adegbulus' view that the thought of transparency is seen as utopia than feasible. It is in this vein that the call for reform is meaningful.

Every successive government of Nigeria has tried in one way or the other to fight corruption or engage in reforms. When the government of Obasanjo took over the government of Nigeria in 1999 the following were identified as the problems facing the economy of Nigeria.

- Declining capacity utilization in the real sector,
- Poor performance of major infrastructural facilities
- Large budget deficit
- Rising level of unemployment and inflation
- Grave problems of importation dependence
- Reliance on a single commodity oil
- Weak industrial base
- Low level of agricultural production
- A weak private sector
- High external debt overlong

All these identified problems could be seen in the high level of embezzlement of public funds and even property, continuous money Laundering, blackmailing? importation of fake and substandard drugs and spare parts, repackaging expired food and

drinks and beverages. In order to be able to tackle these problems the government mapped out its objectives and guiding principles, instruments and machinery to enable them effectively achieve its stated targets and objectives. Some of the programmes of the government is the Poverty Alleviation programmes, micro-economy policies and most importantly privatization of government industries and parastatals and recently monetization. The Poverty Alleviation programme are meant to uplift the standard of living of the down trodden. The microeconomy is to diversify and reduce dependent on one commodity. The privatization of government industries and parastatals is Ss a result of non-challant attitude of Nigerians to government work and government property, vandalization and embezzlement of government funds in these parastatals. Many of the people occupying important and respectable positions in the society who are supposed to be custodians of public property and public funds are those who cart these things away with all immunity. All the problems are called economic sabotage; they seriously undermine the growth of any country's economy.

It is in view of this that the government set up machinery to tackle these problems. Among these machineries are ICPC-Independent and Corrupt Practices Commission and EFCC - Economic and Financial Crime Commission, the activities of these two machineries especially the EFCC have been noticeable. In the words of Nuhu (2006), “Laundering is the conversion or transfer of property knowing that such property is the proceed of crime for the purpose of concealing or disguising the illicit origin of theproperty or helping any person who is involved in the commission of the predicate offence to evade the legal consequence of his act”. The economic impact of money laundering is very devastating. It undermines the integrity of financial institutions because such deposits of illegally acquired wealth into financial system often disappears soon after lodgement thus leading to the insolvency, distress and sometimes collapse of the financial institutions concerned. The cases of BCCI and barring bank are examples, (Nuhu 2006). Another problem of money laundering is Terrorism financing. Though terrorism is not an economic crime but most often the acts of terrorists affect the economy of the country being terrorized or the country terrorizing. The case of America and

Afghanistan are living example. Few instances of economic crimes that have called for reforms will be cited below to buttress this paper. The case of Governors Dariye of Plateau State and Diepreye Alamieyeseigha on money Laundering are examples still fresh in the minds of every Nigerian. Another person that has graced the pages of newspaper for financial misappropriation is the former Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun. Ayetan (2005) noted that since he became Inspector General Police Balogun has amassed stupendous wealth running to over One Billion Naira traced to 12 different accounts principally and at Fountain Trust Bank. The last two have been disgracefully removed from office as a result of the crimes they have perpetrated against the economy of Nigeria.

This problem of financial mismanagement is not limited to individuals alone. The minister of state for finance, Mrs. Esther Nenadi Usman disclosed that “the federal government, states and all the local councils in the federation lacked fiscal discipline. In a paper presented at the 2005 economic summit at Abuja, she pointed out that

“a worrying character of the Nigerian federation was that fiscal discipline had been lacking at all level of government”. This could be seen in the persistent excessive deficit and unsustainable debt stock, which included unpaid salaries, pensions, contractors and suppliers as well as arrears of external debt service payment due. She further observed that public expenditure at all levels of government has been subjected to wide fluctuations due to reliance on a volatile source of revenue-oil”(Subair 2005).

The banking sector is not left out. On Wednesday, June 8, 2005, a former chairman of Fidelity Bank Plc and one time Managing Director of Nigerian — Arab Bank Mr. Kingsley Ikpe was sentenced to a total of 151 years imprisonment for complicity in illegal financial dealings. Ikpe was arraigned on Feb. 18 2005 by EFCC for allegedly defrauding the chairman of Orange Drutos Ltd the sum of N61 million Naira. (Adeniyi 2005). Also, in the Aviation ministry financial crime has seriously affected the adequate and optimal operation of the ministry. The N14 billion

Naira given to the liquidated Airways to launch Air Nigeria was reported to be missing (Muogbo 2005). The oil industry is nothing to write home about. Every day reports of oil bunkering, and pipeline vandalization throughout the country- Delta, Lagos, Ore, Imo State and recently also in the Northern pail of the country, fill the pages of the newspaper. On June 8, 2005, Task force nabbed a barge containing 200,000 metric tons of motor spirit allegedly used for illegal bunkering together with 5 men who were members of the crew (Awoyemi 2005). A lot of people have defied the fear of death as daily reports of hundreds of lives lost in fire incidence that have engulfed the scene of pipeline vandalization. On October 1, 2005 the Inspector General of Police ordered the police force to hunt, arrest and bring before him any oil baron believed to be the brain behind Age oil vandalization. He however warned members of the police force that the Esprit de corp would not be extended to anybody found guilty of providing cover for oil vandalizers. (Okemi 2005).

In the ministries and public offices, the song is the same, indiscriminate award of contracts is another great threat to economic reforms of Nigeria economy. Most of the contracts are awarded to people not because they are qualified to do the job but because they know somebody in authority. This is probably the reason for the introduction of due process in the ministries. In the political scene, the EFCC has continued to tour all the states of the federation to discover and quiz over N60 million scam (Okemi 2005opt cit). The list of all these economic and related crimes would be endless if we should attempt listing all, as the crime certainly cut across all the sectors of economy of Nigerian society. The most difficult thing about this cankerworm is that ho government admits of itself being corrupt especially when such government is in power. The incumbent will always point accusing fingers on the predecessors as being corrupt. It is only when the incumbent leaves that the incoming government will X-ray the financial crimes of its past.

At this juncture, kudos need to be given to the administration led by President Olusegun Obasanjo for trying to let the Nigerians know that even the government in power can fight corruption. The various

reforms initiated by this administration “have never been attempted by any of the previous government”.

The Influence of Religious Education on Economic Reforms

Religion and moral education serve as guidance not only for the people involved in religion but also for every person in the society. Religion and moral education teaches men what is right and wrong, it equips in man the concern to make correct decisions when they encounter moral problems such as the temptation to steal, kill, vandalize and all the like. Religion and moral education encourages us to work hard and then pray for God's blessing on whatever we do. It discourages laziness, gossiping, and unnecessary waste of time among people. As the Bible put it “He who does not work should not eat”. Religion and moral education trains man's moral conscience makes man to be humane and considerate in dealing with people around him. It enables all men to see themselves as children of the same parents (God is our father in heaven) and of the same family. This reduces tribalism and the problem of resource control. With religion and moral education people will develop the spirit of fellowship and corporate attitude towards life.

When religion and moral education is taught, the level of dignity, decency and discipline is enhanced. Religious education teaches men to obey and respect the law. It takes care of man's spiritual nature and prepares man for life people. Man is prone to amass wealth no matter how it is amassed is not the problem but religion teaches man to amass the wealth that lasts even into the life beyond. It restores the sense of value in man as well as respect for what does not belong to us.

CONCLUSION

Often people argue that man does not need religion to succeed but it is known today that without religion man will be an enemy of all and even himself. The early missionaries and other religious bodies like Islam and traditional religion cited earlier in this paper has shown that religion and economic development go together. Religious education teaches man to become a good and patriotic citizen.

Religion gives a better understanding Of God, His intention-and purpose for man, which is to possess eternal life. Man should learn to involve God in everything he does. Only Religion can do this. It may not be wrong if we say that corruption in the economic and socio-political system in Nigeria has taken a very deep root in the life system of every Nigerian. This pervasive trend is so difficult and serious that “taking corruption out a Nigerian is like taking fish out of river” (Sanni 2003). Recommendation. It is recommended therefore that the government, should introduce religious and moral education into the school curriculum and even extend it to higher institutions to train the conscience of the young and growing Nigerians for the various reforms of the government and the activities of ICPC and EFCC in fighting economic and financial crimes to last long. Any type of reform without first trying to work on the “inner man” is bound to fail, as so many of such have failed in the past as soon as the government that introduced it goes out of office.

A good example is the War Against Indiscipline introduced by Buhari and Idiagbon regime.

It is also recommended that the immunity clause protecting some political office holders be reviewed if not scrapped in order to achieve success.

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