



Corruption of Religion and the Religion of Corruption: Rethinking Marxist's Sociology of Religion in Modern Nigeria



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Abstract

The interconnectivity of religion and capital in modern industrial age pose confounding challenges within the context of unraveling scenario of culture of corruption in several African nations including Nigeria. The strategic positioning and solid affiliations of religious stalwarts in the scheme of capitalist arrangement function to reinforce mass impoverishment and dampens the hope of fostering institutional accountability among state and economic actors. Just as religion is fast becoming engraving in capital so likewise capital is magnetizing religious doctrinal values with such an unending relationship generating a twist in both the essence and mythology of religion. Consequently, this paper attempts to investigate major factors accounting for the engraftment of contemporary religious leadership in Nigeria into capitalist network with the former helping to raise the hope of the possibilities of achieving prosperity and simultaneously muzzling their adherents from questioning the basis of their poverty directly birthed and nurtured by capitalist corruption. It attempts to achieve this by adopting Marxist's sociology of religion as analytic framework. Finally, the paper strongly advocates for a re-direction of religious priorities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion; Corruption; Criminality

Introduction

Religion as a transcendental institution has historically secured a place in socio-philosophical writings in all ages and societies. With the initial contributions of Maimonades who professes that there is no truth other than God, to Durkhiem, one of the founding fathers of sociology, who professes that there is no falsification to the claims of religions and to a more contemporary reflection of Derrida who argues that there is nothing outside the scripture, the pervasiveness of religion remains uncontestable [1-3]. Every single human population that we know has or has had some form of religion or the other [4]. Research reveals that 87 percent of world's population adheres to some religion and with 13 percent nonreligious or atheist [5]. Consequently, without prejudice to the ubiquity of religion, one outstanding fact about its pervasiveness is that the understanding of this institution in modern society often poses daunting challenges to varied observers. This is more so as interdisciplinary scholarly efforts often culminate into unending diversity of appreciation. Depending on the angle of vision upon which a beholder examines the phenomenon therefore, religion presents a double edged implication for human society.

It operates as an instrument of enforcing virtue and it equally serves as a potent mechanism for legitimizing gamut of vices. Basically, sociological interest in religion is directed at knowing the content of religious beliefs, commitments and the effects it has on health, the family, politics, public morality and other matters [6].

When considering the analytic approach of modern religion therefore, the romanticization or otherwise with religion is a factor of the questions we seek to answer and the behavior or result we seek to eulogize. In essence, the malleability of human personality generatable through the dissemination of religion dogmas tends to create a social man and as well as anti-social man across history but more of anti-social beings in contemporary society. The multiplicity in the generation of the anti-social man in this dispensation is closely linked with the activities of modern religious organizations often called the new religious movements (NRM's). The unique nature of this group and its zealotry at propagating religio-capitalist ethos informs the sociological analysis of this paper. Consequently, holding other factors attributable to corruption constant, the paper looks at

modern capitalism and its infusion with today religion as they both combined to increase the magnitude of corruption and impoverishment of the masses in Nigeria. In explaining this, the paper adopts Neo-Marxist approach to establish the basis of corruption and further stresses the need to rejuvenate religion to usher in moral revolution in Nigeria.

Defining Religion, Capital and Corruption

The conceptualization of these three technical terms remains vital to our understanding of their usage in the body of this paper. There are lots of perspectives about what religion consists of. Religion centered in beliefs and practices that are related to sacred as opposed to the profane things [2] institution capable of addressing the ultimate concerns of the meaning of human existence [7]; it is viewed as those socially shared and organized ways of thinking, feeling and acting that concerns ultimate meanings about the existence of the supernatural or 'beyond' [8]; norms, beliefs and rituals constitute the fabric of religion [9]. Religion as adopted in this paper will take the form of absolute reliance or trust in the divine, supernatural or sacred intervention over spiritual, physical, socio-economic, psychological and environmental problems or dilemma.

Considering capital (ism), the central focus is on ownership of wealth, power and all other resultant exploitations and corruption emanating thereof in the modern society. Capital involves the merger of both political and economic bourgeoisie with their symbolic or substantive representation in diverse religious organizations. This category consist of membership of various religious bodies holding strategic positions either in government, civil service or the private sector of the national economy. They constitute the politico-economic class which apart from zealously practicing the culture of corruption in the public sphere, strife to hold sensitive appointments in major religious organizations. This effort in a sense is diametrically opposed to the interest of the masses and ultimately that of their fellow adherents. It represents a class within whose domain the fate of the masses is given the picture of reality. Corruption components as used in this paper include displacement of trust [10], misrepresentation, moral pervasion or ethical dislocation [11], treacherous collusion and adversarialism [12]. New Religious Movement (NRM) consists of religious denominations possessing distinct attributes from known orthodox religious organizations. These attributes may include fanaticism, emphasis on wealth making, earthly bliss, empowerment etc.

Current argument on Marxism and Religion

The general appreciation of Marxism and religion has often been considered with the basic aim of highlighting the opposable relationships between the two [13]. However, it is quite important to realize that there are verifiable areas of convergence embedded in Marxism and religion. The fact about this synergy informs the writing of this paper. Marxism and religion is both instrument of change; while the former attempts

to liberate the poor, the latter, possesses independent or radical effect on social life. The adoption of Marxism for current discourse move away remarkably from traditional Marxism and locates religion/capital symbioses in the recent work of Neo-Marxist scholars such as [14-18]. The position of these scholars remind on the need to re-prioritize in the dispensation of religion/capital relationship so as to locate a favorable ground for the transformation the socio-economic situations of vast majority of religious adherents in capitalist societies. Therefore, in order to fully appreciate the Neo-Marxist approach as it affects our current discourse, a brief examination of traditional Marxism on religion will be considered.

The underpinning principle of Marxism in religion is his focus on how religion turns people's attention away from social and economic inequality Ferrante, 2003 [19]. Marx [20] believed that religion was the most humane feature of an inhumane world which arose from the tragedies and injustice of human experience. He held that in stratified or class societies, religion serve the interest of the ruling elite at the expense of the masses [21,22]. It teaches that the existing social arrangements of a society represent what God desires for the material moment [23]. Religion becomes a necessity in the human quest to make the world bearable and to justify or rationalize their existence. Although Marx acknowledges the roles of religion for earthly living and eternal explications, he nevertheless frowns at the repressive, constraining and exploitative qualities of the institution. This position is understandable since religion according to him inhibits the critical evaluation of life situations, dulls the initiatives of its adherents and shift peoples attention away from the causes of their continued impoverishment (reminiscence of the modern day governance), exploitation and poverty. Marx linked religion and capitalism as complementing one another, but blamed the need to satisfy capitalist interests on the nature of this affiliation [20]. The nature of religion/capital affiliation informs the take off point of the earlier mentioned Neo-Marxists.

Bataille one of the Neo-Marxist, depicts the modern world as one in which as a result of the rise of capitalism; man has become "more estranged from himself than ever before". The estrangement exists in two forms. Man is estranged from his unrestricted access to socio-economic materials that make his essence meaningful as well as being estranged from his creator. Analyzing the second form of estrangement, life is continually made meaningless to a lot of people as a result of the outcomes emanating from the gradual collusion between religion and capital which clearly exemplifies a symbiotic relationship across major cultures. The excessive borrowing of capitalist ethos of "making it at any case" 'born to reign and dominate' 'possess your possession by fire and thunder' scripturally rooted in the wealth possession of religious patriarchs signified the commencement point of religious derailment and immorality. The scriptural basis upon which the patriarchs made their wealth is often less

emphasized and common-sensual push to jump start people in to becoming dubious elements becomes a celebrated dogmas.

The possession or pursuit of wealth is not conceived within this context as morally wrong but the excessive nature of the pursuit in the modern religious settings which often generates banishment of decorum and leading to diverse corrupt related practices appears contentious. New religious organizations are pursuing an ideology depicting an era where religious morality is paving ways to capitalist morality. In essence, rather than producing religious beings new religious organizations are producing capitalist beings that are busy calculating earthly wealth by substituting such wealth for heavenly acceptance as exemplified in Calvinism. In the process of reaching out for wealth, fellow beings are displaced from meaningful existence [15]. Opines that capital has thoroughly eliminated all 'moral' elements within its conception of the sacred and the 'moral' forms of religion that seek to stand 'outside' capital are gradually being eroded. In essence, religion ought to contradict the capitalist nature of impersonality and amorality by preaching love for one's fellow or what can be described as religious affectivity. It also sought to allay man the feeling of being disjointed; unconnected and alone, but contrary to these aforementioned roles, development in modern capitalist environment reveals the intensification of economic insecurity for mass of religious adherents due to collusion of religion and capital [24].

The fusion of religion and capital is what Deleuze and Guattari [17] have described as 'unnatural participations'. It is further explained as a process of 'becomings'. The symbiotic relationship between religion and capital may be adjudged to operate beneath the reach of intentionality amongst the religio-economic and political actors. The furtherance of individualism in the face of collectivism explicable in religious philosophy negates the naturalness endemic in sacred relationship. Deleuze and Guattari [17] posit that the fusion of religion and capital generates impersonality which induces 'nonhuman becomings of man'. The centrality of nonhuman becomings of man identified by Deleuze and Guattari [17] lies in religion imbibing the negative attributes of capitalism. (This is evident in the pursuit of wealth, connivance or supporting those already conceived as corrupt with their concomitant corrupt related practices).

Commenting on the magnetic attributes of capital, Deleuze and Guattari [17] view capital as an inherent accelerator of 'deterritorialization', an inciter of desire for its own sake. Capital becomes a mechanism of deterritorialization simply because of its tendency to rally all other institutions including religion into a unified whole. Karl Marx was the first to reveal the magnetic nature of capital when he reported the symbiotic relationship between major social institutions. In his view, capital determines the nature of religious ideology and religion as well plays an important role in propping up the existing social structure and tends to reinforce other social institutions and the social order

as a whole [5]. It is also a potent tool for fostering undetermined desire operating in excess of any concept of 'need'. It is temptuous as its forces people to corruptly amass what they cannot consume not only in their life time but after many generations after them. Modern religion is fast assimilating the ills inherent in capitalism and by implication raising a sociological threat to group cohesion.

Consistently, religion is fast becoming capital and capital is assuming a form of religious ethos, shared and celebrated by vast majority of adherents across existing centers of modern belief systems. However, it is quite possible that one may be at loss when one considers the divergent existence in religion and capitalism, but the fact still remains that the gap between the two is becoming narrowed for obvious reasons. Just as the new religious movements preach sacred and divine personal salvation exemplified in the accumulation of wealth, capital rest fundamentally on the necessity of a profane spirituality of personal salvation in the face of an intended excruciating material deprivation that characterizes the modern world.

In the same way, religion emphasizes pleasurable eternity in heaven, capital present a seductive bates of eternal pleasure on earth. The pursuits of prosperity, wealth making or creation and pleasurable existence underpinning modern religious dogmas of new religious movements present a linkage between religious and capitalist philosophies. The sharp break from the congruent focus on eternal bliss to a quick or sudden merger of earthly and heavenly bliss remarkably signified the exact point of the fusion of capital and religion in modern Nigeria. This is the point of religious materialism exemplified in the deification of 'late capital'. The danger of the wreck less merger involving religion and capital inform the line of thought of Maduro, 1982. [18]. Both scholars suggest the re-direction of religion from being an ally of capital to a potent instrument of positive change. O'Toole [18] armed with Marx and Engel's writings on early Christian's revolutionary feat advocated for a revolutionary religious dogma and practices in modern society that will be capable of checkmating corruption inherent in capitalism. In the same vein Maduro, 1982. Moving away from Marx assertion that religion is encapsulated in capital argues that 'religion is not necessarily a functional, reproductive or conservative factor in society; but it is one of the main (and sometimes the only) available channel to bring about a social revolution.'

New Religious Movements and the Question of Corruption

The controversies attending the nature and operation of new religious movement was reported by Robin and Bromley in 1991. The controversy has been viewed as perhaps the most significant religious conflict ever recorded in human history. What makes this controversy robust in the religious circle is the manner in which religious organizations imbibe capitalist ethos in money generation. Etzioni [25] opines that all organization

develops means of generating economic resources and there is remarkable difference in the ways organizations go about doing this. The need to devise means for money generation is not exclusive to the secular environment alone; it further extends to religious areas of life. The church environment is an identitive environment where myth becomes a driving force in form of normative economic inputs (tithing, special offering, prophet offering, donations etc.) adopted to insure a stable economic resource flow for the laities [26].

Traditionally, religious institution's economic resources are limited to membership contributions and other resources from opportunities having few things to do with the public realm. However, in the modern era, the coming of new religious movements represented in different modes of worship across diverse faith reopened radical methods of resource generation globally [27]. The economic innovations of new religious movements are of sociological significance because they may be harbinger of a shift both in the structuring of religion and the relationship between religion institutions and other segments of the social order [26]. This relationship constitutes the centrality of argument of this paper. Larson, Lowell [26] report that religious institutions possess vast wealth and they enjoy tax exemption over their properties. The extra possession of wealth can only be accounted for by the gradual and innovative movement of new religious organizations along the course of adopting capitalist modes of operation. The continuous movement towards capitalism involves innovations with respect to the adoption of ethos of corporate organizations and religious marketing strategies. The marketing strategy involves the continued proclamation of convincing possibilities of prosperity, earthly bliss and divine dominion over life circumstances accessible by remaining committed to the personal sacrificial injunctions of various religious denominations. This can be succinctly put as "if you sow sparingly, you shall reap sparingly. If sow bountifully, you shall reap bountifully."

Apart from those factors considered above, there is also gradual jettisoning of moral contents underpinning religious values. Historically, the core business of religious institutions is winning of soul and their quest for membership expansion, both efforts which often pushes the religious organizations beyond their immediate boundaries. Research has lately shown that some new religious movements in modern era have taken on attributes of multinational corporations thus making them to have the semblance capitalist conglomerates [13,28]. This formation resonates what Heinemann and Shupe [29] describe as religious "corporate empire". This is achieved through many ways.

These religious movements apart from transforming their members into contributors of money as offerings and special donors, they also often convert them into being customers for goods and services produced and offered by religious

organizations. It may come in a form of spiritual materials (mantle/prophetic handkerchief) often claim to possess supernatural powers or in a dimension of literature that will foster a revolutionary change in the spiritual and socio-economic conditions of the adherents. This development has made the comprehension of religion as institution of social order more complex and non-explicable. Apart from the nature of capitalism inherent in the attributes of new religious movements, there is one other representation in capitalist decadence measurable in moral displacement noticeable in Nigeria's environment and this is briefly described as the dynamics of religion/capital relationship in Nigeria

Reflection on the Dynamics of Religion/Capital Relationship in Nigeria

In most religious circle in Nigeria especially in the Christendom and Islam, very few sects under these two shades of faith consider the need to alter the 'syndrome of business as usual relationship', existing between religion and capital. Few attempts in this regard involve the subtle approaches toward re-addressing the moral imbalance occasioning corruption and; the need to emancipate the poor from the meaninglessness of life through the establishment of educational institutions directed at producing future generations of leaders that will fight corruption headlong. However, it is important to note that the anticipated positive spillover effect of this initiative may probably take a significant number of years to generate expected results for obvious reasons.

These reasons can be explored from two important angles: first, religious connivance with socio-economic and political corruption and second, the decayed environment effects. First, considering connivance, the class reproductive nature (mutation) of corrupt politico-economic leaders remained unperturbed in Nigeria owing to the respect or honour laities across various religions often confer on corrupt leaders. This is often manifested in either inviting them to grace religious occasions or at the extreme given them some religious duties to perform without minding their antecedents, a development viewed as both down playing the potency of religion in checkmating the evils in the socio-economic environment and that which also grant a tacit approval for further corrupt behaviors.

One plausible reason often presented for the acceptance of corrupt personalities in the midst of religious adherents is the need to save their soul from "eternal doom" and by implication securing "attitudinal change" in them but, contrary to this, events have shown that this act always engenders disillusionment among the religious adherents and functions to perfect their muzzling especially from questioning the basis upon which their continual impoverishment and exploitation rest solidly. This may be viewed as an outright disservice to the adherents these faiths owe allegiance and to other religious institutions it hold common faith. Apart from the fault attributable to the

recognition and respect for corrupt leadership, one other fault closely related to this is the making of religious representation with the aim of requesting for assistance, investing for profit, gaining benefits or concessions for sectional or individualistic consumption. If examined from the earlier discussed unholy relationship between religion and capital, the implication of this form of representation might have caused many religious ministries becoming the appendages of corrupt politico-economic institutions in Nigeria. It has also caused what can be described as religious impotency, with religious stalwarts becoming the mouthpiece for those in government or economic circle which in the process guarantees the legitimization of their exploitative/corrupt drives.

Looking at the decayed environment factor in religion/capital alliance in modern Nigeria, it should be very clear that Nigeria's environment is that which celebrates corruption [30]. Possession of wealth is mostly celebrated along major ethnic boundaries in Nigeria and no recourse is often made to the source of wealth, a situation which depicts the environment as a perfect capitalist society [31]. It is also incontrovertible that virtually all Nigerians belong to one religion or the other; this reveals that the distribution of corrupt personalities is significantly correlated with the existence/affiliations to religious centers.

Consequently, individuals in their observance of religious rites tend to offer sacrifices hierarchically or commensurately with their status along the socio-economic ladder, with the most corrupt/exploitative contributing more and those ill favoured in their access to illicit wealth donating less celebrated offerings. Offering differentials among religious adherents determines accorded spiritual status, leadership attention, and other faithful's admiration. All these benefits function to intensify the quest for more individualistic acquisitions mostly generated through corrupt/exploitative related practices. Religious celebration of socio-economic attainments done through referencing of corrupt/exploitative adherents unquestionably strengthens religion/capital relationship in Nigeria [31-39].

Conclusion

It is obvious that religion in the modern world face both challenge and inevitable change. Numerous socio-economic conditions may probably serve as catalyst of religious transformation. The rate of poverty in most developing nations of the world and its impact on the psycho-social living of several adherents raise a lot dilemma on the future of religion and religiosity. In the same way, the collusion of religion, capital and its attendant dying critique of the unjust nature of capitalist relationship represented in acute individualism and corruption remains a cause for concern. The possession of excessive wealth by religious stalwarts across existing religions and the affinity with their counterparts in politics and economic environment clearly situates and reinforces their positions under capitalist arrangement, thus reducing their zeal for the re-evaluation

of the operation of the system as it affects the faithfuls. This marks the centerpiece of religious pollution or corruption. It is also important to note at this juncture, that religion possesses a formidable strength to alter the nature of current capitalist environment. This can only be attained via engaging the repositioning of religious priority by picking up its role as the custodian and enforcer of public morality and through the dissection of capitalist inclination from religious philosophy in Nigeria. Revolution against corruption from the angle of religion can suitably be achieved through a radical change in the doctrinal values and dogmas of various religious institutions.

The change advocated can only be accomplished if there is a corresponding change in the attitude of present religious leaders who are currently engulfed in unbridled wealth accumulation and rivalries of who should be adjudged greatest in the display of God's approval represented in wealth multiplication. In essence, zero tolerance level against corruption should constitute major sermon and the declaration of "woe" on corrupt leaders emulative of Jesus preaching should also be revered above any other dogma supporting their existence. The energies of mass of religious adherent wallowing in poverty now becomes a potent revolutionary instrument and the change in 'sermonization' triggering the re-evaluation of their socio-economic conditions becomes a catalyst to overt revolution.

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