

## RELIGION AND NORMLESSNESS

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### ABSTRACT

*The theoretical framework of this work is Political Economy with emphasis on Dialectical Materialism. Dialectical Materialism is the philosophy of Marx and Engels which encourages practical activities that would bring about the image of the future; of which much has to be learned from the contemporary world, because, the future exists in the present. Dialecticians are interested not only in the relationships of social phenomena in the contemporary world but also in the relationships of those contemporary realities to both past and future. This explains the thesis, antithesis and synthesis phenomena.*

**Keywords:** Religion, Normlessness, political economy, Dialectical Materialism

### INTRODUCTION

Given the place of religion in the world especially Nigeria and the attendant behavior pattern whereby no day passes without hearing, reading and/or experiencing one type of unacceptable happening, for instance killings, shootings, burnings, stealing and even denial of a place in an office or establishment due to varied reasons which are dependent on who is the offender and the offended. Religion according to (the Hutchinson Encyclopedia 1999:905) is perhaps code of belief or philosophy that often involves the worship of a God or gods and the adherents are expected to behave in a certain manner. However, if most religions of the world believe in the existence of a supreme Being who is also well considered as the creator of mankind and the universe then, this paper questions the rationale behind the normlessness that is ravaging the world, despite the major belief and worship of their maker; and this tends to draw our interest to ethnicity as the force behind the unacceptable behavior. Ethnicity refers to people's own sense of cultural identity; a social term that overlaps with such concepts as race, nation, class and religion. Therefore, social scientists use the term ethnic group to refer to groups or societies who feel a common sense of identity often based on a traditional shared culture, language, religion and customs.

The problem of this study is really to investigate the underlining reason why despite the belief in one Supreme being by humans; and the expected and acceptable behavior prescribed by the sects which is known by sociologists as the norms of the society; there are numerous and recorded normlessness which can otherwise be regarded as anomie or deviation from the normal.

There are numerous literature on religion and norms of society by the social scientists an area that Durkheim started the exposition; other scholars are Marx, Weber; these scholars according to Giddens (1993: 463) were not religious, however, each believed that "religion is in a fundamental sense illusion", because, the advocates of different faiths may be wholly persuaded of the validity of the beliefs they hold and the rituals which they participate, yet the very diversity of religions and their obvious connections to different types of society.

The foregoing presentations clearly corroborate my view that the alien religions as they exist in Nigeria today have the cultural backing of their original environment (societies). Therefore, their interaction with Africa or Nigeria brought the disarticulation in the people's religion which directly destroyed the people's way of life thereby producing the normlessness prevalent in this society. Furthermore, Feuerbach 1957 in Giddens states that; religion consists of ideas and values produced by human beings in the course of the cultural development, but mistakenly projected on to divine forces

or gods. The reason being that human beings do not fully understand their own history; they tend to attribute socially created values and norms to the activities of gods.

To support the view that humans create religion as a result of inadequate understanding of who they are; Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2000:296) describe religion as a system of beliefs and rituals with reference to the sacred which binds people together into social groups. Also, Weber and Tillich Ibid view religion as any set of coherent answers to human existential dilemmas e.g. birth, sickness or death; which make the world meaningful.

From the above expressions, religion can include nationalism and also those things that concern us ultimately i.e. all are religious.

On the other hand, norms are expectations about appropriate conduct which serve as common guidelines for social actions; Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2000:43). Therefore, a social norm is not necessarily actual behavior and normative behavior is not simply the most frequently occurring pattern. Since the term refers to social expectations about correct or proper behavior, norms imply the presence of legitimacy, consent and prescription. To that effect, deviations from norms is punished by sanctions, norms are acquired by internalization and socialization.

In the view of Durkheim in (Mukherje 2010:49); there are different social species and the role of institutions change according to the overall social structure; therefore in the earlier social species, religion exhibits a strong, even tyrannical conscience, collective infringements of which are harshly and violently punished. Furthermore, he states that when two populations, two groups of people having an unequal culture come into continuous contact with one another, certain feelings develop that prompt the more cultured group or that which deems itself such- to do violence to the other. To that it is observed that an individual controls himself, only if he feels himself controlled, only if he confronts moral forces which he respects and on which he dare not encroach. Where this is not the case, he knows no limit and extends himself without measure or bounds. As soon as the only moral forces with which he has anything to do are depreciated in his eyes, nothing restrains him; he overflows in violence like the tyrant whom nothing can resist.

Religion also consists of belief and practices that exhibit great diversity. That is why there exist different and diverse religious groups and/or sects e.g. Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Traditional religious practices etc. These different religious groups according to Borchert (2000:383) resemble one another as members of a family resemble one another in various respects, without supposing that all of them satisfy a single set of necessary and sufficient conditions for being a religion.

To Geertz (1966), religion is a system of symbols and acts to establish powerful, persuasive and long lasting moods and motivations in man by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing. These conceptions, as such an aura of factuality and the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. Marx, Durkheim, Weber in Giddens (1996:4) and Ekpenyong (2003), posit that religion has some general characteristics among which are social solidarity and divisive tendency among different groups.

Currently, the divisive aspect of religion is the one that is being propagated by adherents; the perceived reason being the differences in culture, geographical location and the intent to control and allocate the resources by the political and aristocratic class.

Therefore, the main purpose of this work is to identify why in spite of the numerous religious organizations and activities, society is bereft with behavior patterns that are unexpected. Other minor objectives would be to find out why the deviation from the normal in behavior varies in environment and intensity; and finally, why different religious groups behave in aggression to others.

In continuation of this work, it will be necessary to go to field with some guiding propositions; the more different religious groups view themselves to be different in orientation and worship, the more unacceptable behavior patterns manifest in society. The more different religious groups regard others

as inferior, the more crises will continue. Also, the more religious sects describe others as those, the more normlessness shall abound.

It is very clear today that the different religious groups as exist in all known societies are classified as either Christians or Muslims (the two major ones). Due to religion, the world is divided into two poles—the North and South. Within each region, the struggle for the control of the state apparatus has contributed to creating of chaos and unhealthy competition and relationship among the groups. A relationship may be drawn from what (Nnolim 1980:277) described as “ethnic mask over the class struggle.”

In the light of the foregoing, the theoretical thrust of this work is Marxian Dialectics. Dialectical Materialism is the philosophy of Marx and Engels which encourages practical activities that would bring about the image of the future; of which much has to be learned from the contemporary world because the future exists in the present.” The motive for adopting this philosophy is because dialectics are interested not only in the relationship social phenomena in the contemporary world but also in the relationship of those contemporary realities to both past and future. That is how it explains the thesis, antithesis and synthesis phenomena. It is also important to remark that the Africans had their full fledged and standard religion and religious practice which met their spiritual needs. But following the European and French industrial and political revolutions which warranted them to move out to new lands for economic reasons, they set religious tenet before the Africans by condemning their native/traditional religions and thereafter, established their economic aim; a trend (Nwankwo (1990)) describes as the bible in front and the Union Jack behind. The religion perpetuated by foreigners (whites and Arabs); is now giving way for a new foreign religion which is neither European nor African. That is, the variant of Pentecostalism and evangelism.

Purposively, the country is divided into two parts along the dominant religious groups; Christianity and Islam. The dominant religious group at the Northern pole of Nigeria is Islam and the adherents described as Moslems, while in the Southern part it is Christianity and its adherent called Christians.

The inhabitants of the above described groups have different cultural and environmental backgrounds and therefore, palpable ideological lean. In the light of the above knowledge therefore, Rivers, Oyo and Kaduna states were chosen as the area of study and three hundred respondents were sampled and their responses are articulated for discussion.

This investigation shows that from the different parts of the society (country) that the respondents independently agreed that there is but one Supreme Being who has different names depending on who or what sect/group is describing it (God/Allah). They further agreed that their religions prescribe a behavior pattern that brings about order among its members. Finally, the different groups exposed that the antagonism or normlessness that sometimes rears its ugly head in the country are most times the resultant effect of what those they hold in high esteem demonstrate or represent in the schema of the entire nation. This is to state that the normlessness pervading the country is not purely religious rather it is cultural or ethnic which is a very important factor that saliently and openly drives the different adherents to suspect and antagonize others and thereby perpetuating normlessness or disorder.

To add credence to this identified singular and important factor is (Okeke culled from The Justice Magazine June 2005-2006:6); that as long as a group (ethnic or religious) identity plays greater part in obtaining and sharing power, there will be no end to group agitation.” Furthermore, this paper posits that though Nigerians are presumed to be religious however, there seems to be a lot shrouded in the garment of ethno-cultural identities rather than strictly religious. To add credence to the identified fact are the words of Rev. Fr. Okeke “that the identity of different ethnic groups has been largely ignored, neglected or taken for granted and so it is impossible to have relative peace or mutuality in such a structure.”

Also, on Nov 24, 2011; NTA reported that the renewed violence at Jos is due to ethnic differences rather than religious group struggling for supremacy. In the light of the foregoing statement however, etal in The Justice Magazine states that; the extent the identities of groups determine access to or sharing of power in a society will be greatly reduced if not neutralized. This implies that as long as

group (ethnic or religious) identity plays greater part in obtaining and sharing power, there will be continued normlessness and agitation in the society.

This work found out that the normlessness experienced in different societies of the world; whether developed or developing is not purely religious; rather, that most of the unacceptable human actions to man especially in Nigeria is ethno-cultural. Mention and references are as had been reported in few of the illustrations below:

- a. The German-Nazi Massacre - 1944
- b. Rwanda Massacre - 1994
- c. Maitaisine Massacre - In the 80's in Nigeria
- d. Zango-Kataf Incidence - In the 90's in Nigeria
- e. Jos continued violent presently, in Nigeria
- f. Most recent and on-going scare of Boko Haram, in Nigeria

These incidents and more have left the countries and the entire world restless and boiling; as they caused and created indelible and unforgettable land marks on the psyche of the world.

It was also found out that the incidences occurred during or immediately after the meetings of the various religious sects; creating the impression that the attack was a religious one and so, the various religious groups on their part would do everything within their human power to defend and protect their interest; thereby making it difficult if not near impossible to willfully and sincerely provide information as to assist in checking the menace of unwanted destruction of humanity and its environment.

The Guardian 22, 2011:4 also states that Boko Haram which was known to have religious undertone is inadvertently sponsored by a people of higher repute in Nigeria politically. Even the cancerous war between Israel and Palestine, is not purely religious rather it has ethno-cultural veil, despite the fact that the world views it along religious line.

Finally, to concretize my view that the normlessness of society is not purely religious, rather ethnic, the admonition of Aliyu in Punch November 21, 2011:8 to Boko Haram sect to resolve disputes in a peaceful manner rather than embark on acts which can have negative effects on the country's unity; since according to him both Christianity and Islam were against the act of taking innocent lives and shedding of blood. He concluded that "Islam in particular does not condone suicide bombing."

To hitherto put this discussion on strong pedestal, an attempt is hereby made to clarify a few concepts:-

### **Religion**

According to (Marshall 1996:447); religion is a set of beliefs, symbols and practices (rituals) which is based on the idea of the sacred and which unites believers into a socio-religious community... However, for this paper, religion is the art and science of the in-depth knowledge of the creator of what man cannot comprehend with common sense or reasoning. That is called God; and an attempt to this knowledge evokes emotion and awe in the seeker(s) and this emotion serves as a thread that knits the protagonists to one whole, based on how different groups view their Master as relayed by the disciples of their original leader, e.g. Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha etc.

### **God**

A being of ineffable ability, who has different names, different inspired beings and who is venerated differently depending on the environment and the initiator.

**Normlessness**

This is a phenomenon whereby committee of humans act in a way that is unacceptable to the mental and physical wellbeing of all those individuals in that relationship; and many reasons may have proffered such behavior.

**Ethno-Religious**

This states that peoples' ideas and veneration of God are predicated on their shared traits by members of a group due to their common and cultural tradition, which varies from environment to environment.

**Culture**

It is the totality of learned and symbolic aspects of human society, which includes; material and non-material aspects of the group not excluding religion.

**CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY**

This work concludes that religion is a medium through which humanity seeks to know God, himself and the environment. Also, that all religions believe in the existence of a Supreme Being that is called different names based on the environment and/or religion. Further, that all religions believe in the sanctity of human beings. Therefore, going by the basic facts that stated immediately above; that the unacceptable behavior that is fraught in society today is not purely based on religion per se rather, that the struggle for the control of the available resources which may be political, economic has been the arrow head. However, humans understanding the importance of religion and the emotions elicited when religion is being discussed, hide under the guise of religion to unleash unhealthy actions to others in order to achieve their personal ambition.

That is why, it is very common to observe that when a person who is occupying a high political, economic position in society falls out of favor with his counterparts at the centre, he stylishly goes back to his region or root to solicit for support by telling his people that why he is treated negatively is because he is from this religion or that; an action that automatically generates and garners support for the individual. The attendant reaction may be a peaceful demonstration by that sect which feels marginalized or deprived; issuing of public statement and worse still carrying of arms and ammunition and thereby destroying and/or demolishing any perceived group or person that is responsible for excluding that group from supposed national cake.

This paper summarizes that there are unacceptable behavior patterns going on in the society and also, that religion is a very important aspect of humans. However, that the different methods employed by different religious groups to contact the Supreme Being (God) is basically the main contributory factor to the observed and continued antagonism which pervades the world and which is considered as normlessness by this paper. Also, the differences in the worship of God is essentially due to the perceived teachings of those who religious sect revolve around; who themselves are not founders of any religion, rather they taught fundamental truth; be it Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha to mention a few.

Therefore, the culture of a people is quantumly enshrined in the way the different people perceived different people whose religious styles are tied to the 'Teacher' whose disciples (followers) subdued or converted the indigenous people of their area of practice which is encapsulated in what society experiences as religious war, destruction of human and intolerance all over. So, if religious leaders tread with caution on how they package and transmit their teachings, then there will be increased tolerance and good neighborliness. This is supported by Oritsejafar in (The nation Nov 22, 2011:3).

**RECOMMENDATION**

This paper having established that religion is universal because it is practiced in all societies, traditional modern and developed and developing; and also that practitioners believe in the existence of a Supreme Being that is named based on its environment, language and that is why the methods of veneration varies from society to society. Further, identified is the fact that all religions respect lives, therefore, the normlessness that is ongoing in all known societies, Nigeria inclusive is but an

aberration in religious dictum, but rather predicated on the cultural or ethnic settings of the proponents and how they view their position on the scale of national resources as perpetuated by those they view as the role models or leaders which in this case is religious.

Therefore, the way a particular region views and reacts to other regions of the society, to a large extent determines how to react to the perceived or unfriendly action even on a slightest provocation and then the attendant normlessness.

In a nutshell, religion in its self is not the cause of normlessness, rather, the way a group perceives the other and it is purely ethnic based on how the different leadership view their relationship with the others on the stead of national resources.

In the light of the above findings, this work recommends that the ethnic leaders, be they political, religious or social; should cease to antagonize the nation using the less privileged whenever they fall out of favor with their class members at the centre.

Second, that the National Government should endeavor by all means to provide enlightenment education to the less privileged by which means the latter will know and understand that their ethnic leaders are manipulating them for their own good and thereby maintaining the class divide between the poor and the rich.

Third, the government should provide social amenities or 'good things of life' to the masses, because, when the less advantaged have and enjoy minimal comfort, they will cease to be easy tools for the highly placed to manipulate for their status quo.

Finally, the religious leaders should henceforth embrace Spirituality rather than materiality; that is, the religious leaders should be pious in their life styles rather than exhibiting so much affluence, which in turn has a 'demonstrative effect' on their followers: an example which has caused the society untold hardship and life has become a haven for normlessness and antagonism.

When the above four points discussed in these section are achieved, all, including the rich and poor, the Northerners and Southerners, Westerners and Easterners; will realize that god is but One; and the different names and worship patterns are but the product of the practitioners environment. So, any way and style anyone deems best to worship or contact god is just but the same; for no one would know God beyond his/her consciousness. With such realization, humanity shall view all to come from one Source and therefore, are one with divine. Then this shall be the end of all normlessness and antagonism and the Utopia Plato was referring to, would be attained.

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