

Religiosity, Poverty and Underdevelopment: A Comparative Discuss of the Nigerian Society

¹ Ugwueje, Ebere Augustine and ²Udeh, Promise Chukwuedozie

¹Department of Sociology, Abia State University, Uturu.

²Nigeria Maritime University, Okerenkoko, Delta State.

Email: promiseudeh07@gmail.com

Email: affwin64@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the pertinent issue of religiosity with its consequent religious intolerance, conflict and exploitation in Nigeria and its implication for socio-economic development. Available data on the level and dimensions of religious intolerance and insecurity in Nigeria reveals an increase over the years, which constitutes serious threat to lives and properties, hinders economic activities and discourages local and foreign investors, all of which stifles and retards Nigeria's socio-economic development. This rising wave of insecurity and exploitation by religious leaders has not abated but has assumed a dangerous dimension which is threatening the corporate existence of the country as one geographical entity. In the light of the above the paper concludes that to deal with poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria, there is need for requisite cognitive reorientation which deemphasizes the supremacy of religious dogmas over scientific enquiry, thoughtfulness over prayers and the un-questionable '*anointing*' status of the actions and teachings of religious leaders. Based on the foregoing, this paper recommends that investment in quality education and cognitive reorientation of the citizens are key approaches to save Nigeria from the brinks of religiosity and underdevelopment.

Keywords: Religious intolerance, socio-economic, and insecurity

INTRODUCTION

Religion mystifies the relationship between man and inanimate objects. Men worship mentally-constructed spirit beings; giving them powers which they do not have, including the authority to dominate their lives. Therefore, man's way to realize his potentials and understand his environment is to appease these mental creations through specified deeds, beliefs, dogmas, rituals and sacrifices. Religious practices, including events, acts and beliefs form an integral part of human existence. Without religion, man's existence on earth will be meaningless, mundane and unexplainable. It is therefore correct to say that, "religions have always been the anchor of identity for human beings" [1]. In his [2], French Sociologist, Emile Durkheim, defined religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single, moral community called church, and all those who adhere

to them" [2]. Here, the church is not used colloquially to refer to a building but to all people with similar beliefs and learned practices. Durkheim, Parsons and Bellah argue that religion performs important positive functions for society; Malinowski on his own argues that it performs an important function for the individual. Whether for the society or for the individual, all agree that religion as a conservative force performs important positive functions for society and for the individual by creating and promoting cohesion, social order/stability and maintenance of the value consensus that helps to preserve the status quo and prevent upheavals and rapid social change.

However, when these learned religious beliefs, doctrines and dogmas are taken to the extreme it gives rise to the concept of religiosity. This is seen as an intense, excessive, or fervent religiousness. Contrary to the positive function of religion as a creator of social order,

religiosity plays a dysfunctional role of creating disorderliness leading to destruction of life and properties. The big question this paper is concerned about is: Why does a belief system made mostly to understand the world around us and practiced mostly by coming together as a community creates such negative outcomes? Why in this age of enlightenment in which the benefits of global exchange and inter-faith discourse are well known (or at least easily retrievable), and in a supposedly secular state as Nigeria, how do people still get around to murdering each other based on religious sentiments? Why is the level of tolerance for otherness so low, and that of suspicion so high? Why then do some of their adherents appear ever-ready to slip into the bestiality of violence in order to maintain the purity of their own supposedly peaceful faith?

This is the case because of the feeling of superiority and lineation. Superiority occurs where religion makes people feel like their religious in-group is better than all others. Religious extremists often describe their actions as saving the world from evil out-groups. For example, Islamic terrorists are fighting to ensure the victory of Islam over all other religions. In the words of al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIL, "The war that we are waging...is the war of the people of faith against the people of disbelief." Extremists therefore dichotomize the world into their own religion which is superior in some way and everyone else's. This religious superiority leads to conflict because it provides extremists a motivation for it. Extremists believe that other religions are harmful or fear that other religions might overrun their own; and this motivates them to do what they see as justified and create conflict to eradicate or at least harm "inferior" out-groups. Again, lineation, the idea of in-groups versus out-groups is another way that religion causes conflict in much the same way as any group of people can. This is done by delineating who belongs and who doesn't. In India, for example, some people use religion to delineate Hindus and Muslims

and in Nigeria the delineation is between Moslems and Christians.

Unfortunately, people of high religiosity like members of ISIL and Boko Haram show less favor to scientific knowledge [3] and do not embrace scientific knowledge [4]. This dislike of science and strict adherence to religious dogmas leads to backwardness. This is a major reason why Africa's underdevelopment is tied to religiosity.

Africa is the most religious continent in the world [5]. 89% of African citizens are religious in comparison with North America (59%), Latin America (84%), Western Europe (51%), Eastern Europe (66%), Arab World (77%), West Asia (64%), South Asia (83%), East Asia (39%) and North Asia (17%) [6]. Nigeria is among Africa's most religious country (93%), while Kenya rates (88%), Tunisia (75%), Ghana (96%), Cameroon (82%) and South Sudan (79%). The result of the WIN/Gallup international polls taken in 2008, 2009 and 2015 also revealed that underdeveloped nations scored high in religiosity, with Ethiopia at (99%), Malawi (99%), Niger (99%), Sri Lanka (99%), Yemen (99%), Burundi (98%), Djibouti (98%), Mauritania (98%), Somalia (98%), Afghanistan (97%), Comoros (97%), Egypt (97%), Guinea (97%), Laos (97%), Cambodia (96%), Jordan (96%), and Senegal (96%), while Chad, Ghana, Mali, Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Zambia have (95%) each [7]. These show that the most religious and poor countries of the world are found in Africa.

Poverty thrives in the face of religiosity. The Brookings Institute exposed that one in three Africans -422 million people live below the global poverty line, that is, over 70 percent of the world's poorest people are found in Africa. The Institute projects that by 2030, 377 million people will still live below \$1.90 per day. Of these figures, Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Congo, which represent more than one-quarter of total poverty in Africa today are projected to have almost half of Africa's poorest people by 2030, with a projected increase of about 20 million due to increase in

population [8]. The [9] classified 51.4 percent of Nigerians as “multi dimensional poor” while an additional 16.8 percent are “vulnerable to multidimensional poverty.” The intensity of deprivation in Nigeria, which is the average deprivation score experienced by people in multidimensional poverty is 56.6 percent [10]. Implicitly, the more religious a society becomes, the farther it sinks into poverty and underdevelopment [11].

In the midst of high religiosity where Christian leaders exploit their poor adherents, and Moslem leaders perpetuates intergenerational poverty through fatalism and fundamentalism, the African region has remained the least-developed and most corrupt continent in the world. The Transparency International (2019) Corruption Perception Index (CPI) showed that Sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest-scoring region with an average of 32. In the words of Zuckerman cited in [12], “not a single advanced democracy that enjoys benign, progressive socio-economic conditions retains a high level of popular religiosity.” The question is, why is poverty, hunger, unemployment, corruption and low innovations prevalent in countries with high religiosity?

Conceptualization of Key Terms

Religiosity

Religiosity is an individual’s preference, beliefs and actions that refer to an existing (or self-made) religion [13]. Religiosity is the intensity of religious feeling [14]. It is the emotional attachment and interpretation given to every occurrence from a religious perspective and the extent of one’s connection and adherence to religious doctrines. Religiosity is not about participation in religious activities, but extreme exhibition of religious worldviews. It contrasts with secularism. Secularism encourages the decline of supernatural belief systems and reliance on scientific initiatives to solve social problems. Religiosity is the extent to which an individual internalizes the doctrines of belief system, the level of commitment and the extent to which these

beliefs define his world views [15]. [16] definition is apt because religion is a social institution whose beliefs are culturally inherited and transmitted [17]. Religion’s worldviews can be passed consciously and unconsciously to upcoming adherents and because religion commands awe, it has the tendency to define the worldviews of adherents.

Fanaticism

There is a thin line between religiosity and religious fanaticism. [18] wrote that religious fanaticism implies “the spirit of religiosity which so controls the life of its victims that it blinds their eyes to any other truths or causes, natural, logic, or upon hard fact. The agitator of fanaticism are moved by emotional response” [19] which may be borne by reverence to the history of the religion or its dogmas which could include disregard for science, reverence for constituted authority, subservience to religious and political authorities, contentment for socio-economic status etc. Attempts to question religiosity is deemed heretic and must be resisted. Societies with high religiosity regard personal, socio economic and political conditions as acts of god which should not be subjected to scientific reasoning. The difference between religiosity and religious fanaticism is belief and action. Religiosity is a rigid belief system which does not force non-adherents to accept dogmas, while religious fanaticism is the application of elements of coercion by fanatics with the hope of forcing non-devotees to accept a dogma.

Doctrines and Dogmas

A doctrine is an unquestionable religious principle. Doctrines seek to provide religion with intellectual systems for guidance in the process of instruction, discipline, propaganda, and controversy [20]. A dogma is defined as avoidance from accepting others’ beliefs, ideas and behaviors [21]. Doctrines and dogmas aim to promote obedience to religious teachings, resist questioning of religious teachings, oppose attempt to question religious beliefs through science and show loyalty to religious teachers.

Doctrines and dogmas are the building blocks of religiosity because without it, religion is mundane.

Doctrines and dogmas help religious people to interpret the content of religious books and exercise the obligations expected to safeguard the lines between tolerance and error. Dogmatism revolves around a fundamental belief in absolute power [22]. [23] definition is apt because dogmatic people have an extreme sense of religiosity and live in accordance to the doctrines of their religious teachings. As such, they exclusively discard critical thinking and other attempts to scientifically approve or disprove their doctrines. Dogmatic people resist the ideas of others and develop a sense of happiness when they interact with people of similar views. Doctrines and dogmas are interchangeable concepts. The distinction in both concepts is that, doctrines are less-firmly established religious beliefs, while dogmas are doctrines with official status. Doctrines aim to preserve the faith by defending religious teachings. In some religious sects, it is forbidden to question socio-political exploitation by religious and political leaders. Such attempts contravene the dogmas of respect for constituted authorities enshrined in spiritual books. For instance, in some religions, blood transfusion is strictly forbidden because it is regarded as a sacrosanct part of human existence, hence, it is anti-doctrinal to either give or take blood in all circumstances.

Underdevelopment

In economic terms, underdevelopment is the low level of development characterized by low real per capita income, widespread poverty, low literacy, low life expectancy and underutilization of human and material resources. Underdevelopment is a state of deprivation. It does not occur in a vacuum. In economic terms, underdevelopment is a result of none sustainability of social developmental policies, uneven access to quality education and health, uneven

distribution of economic resources among the various social classes and low regards for human intellectual capacity.

For development to occur, there must be requisite human knowledge that welcomes innovation, discards religious dogmatism, questions the lopsided nature of income distribution, challenge religious subservience and encourage scientific reasoning in attempts to solve human problems. All over the world, societies with high religiosity show indices of under development because of dogmatic orientations [24]. This is because of tendencies to exhibit "emotional response" to social problems [25]. Religiosity sustains social deprivation through its disagreement with scientific knowledge. [26] noted that, secularism, that is, less inclination to religiosity is the major strategy that propagates economic growth initiatives, modernization and equality. It is not surprising that Nigeria's underdeveloped status is a result of the interplay arising from reliance on 'God's grace and prayers' to turn around its underdeveloped conditions.

Theoretical Framework

Inequality is the fulcrum of capitalism as espoused by [27]. Karl Marx explained that capitalism is entrenched in all social institutions including religion. The relationship in every social institution is found on the basis of interrelationships between two social classes - the bourgeoisie and the proletariat class. Marx believed that the major function of religion is to prevent the proletariat class from critical thinking and making demands for social change. The strategy employed by the bourgeoisie religious elites is to reinforce doctrines that preach against scientific knowledge, question the existence of the society's mental construct (God), and reliance on prayers, beliefs and other 'opiates' as the solution to human problems. The higher the social deprivations, the more religious a society will be [28].

Marxism was expanded in [29] deprivation hypothesis. Deprivations may be mental, political, economic and social. A society is

deprived if its members do not have access to opportunities needed to live above minimum national standard. Deprivation is the consequence of lack of access to life necessities, including quality education, standard health care, employment, and other indices. In economic terms, deprivation may be absolute - when household income falls below the standard needed to meet the basic needs of its members - or relative deprivation - when household earnings are not commensurate with the median income available in the country. Deprivation is a precondition for poverty and underdevelopment.

Religion is the first option available to deprived people [30]. Religion “distracts them from finding practical political solutions to their problems” [31]. A deprived man is poor and powerless, “the powerless find an illusion of happiness through religion” [4]. Religion is an opiate of the deprived due to its soothing features of reassuring the downtrodden, hopeless and helpless class that tomorrow will be better [9]. Furthermore, religion creates fear in the minds of the deprived. This fear includes fear of falling out of favor with God over belief in science and existentialism, fear of incurring God’s displeasure when dogmas and doctrines promulgated by the religious elite class are questioned, and fear of incurring God’s displeasure over failure to support the expansion of religious interests. This fear increases greater emotions and worsens the economic conditions of the already deprived.

In under developed societies such as Nigeria, people opt for religiosity as a

means to find solutions to problems that require scientific approach. When deprivations such as hunger, poverty, unemployment and others worsen, the deprived may hypothesize that their new condition is a result of sin or low religious ties with God. To better their socio-economic conditions, the deprived class transcend from mere religious attendees to high religiosity, envisaging that, if religion offers hope to the deprived, religiosity may offer better solutions. That is why people want to pray away poverty [6], hold on to religious dogmas and superstitions, resist scientific knowledge and discourage technological innovations.

Religiosity and Global Underdevelopment

Religiosity and underdevelopment are interwoven and they have severe impact on underdeveloped countries. Africa’s religiosity surpasses those of Israel and Saudi Arabia, where the world’s largest religion, Christianity and Islam, originated from. Israel and Saudi Arabia are located in the Western Asian region. Western Asia’s religiosity is pegged at (64%), while Africa’s religiosity is (89%) [15]. [1] conducted a survey on global religiosity and discovered that on a global average scale, 59% of the world’s population, irrespective of whether they attend places of worship or not, lay claim to being religious, 23% said they are not religious, while 13% are atheists. While First and Second World countries are better off in human development, the story is different in Africa. The global religious index survey conducted by [19] further showed that religiosity is influenced by socio-economic class.

Table 1: Religiosity and Income Level

Income Bracket	Proportion Describing Themselves as Religious (%)
Medium quintile (low income)	66
Medium low quintile	65
Medium quintile	56
Medium-high quintile	51
High quintile (high income)	49

Source: WIN-Gallup, 2012

Majority (66%) of medium quintile (low income) countries are Third World Countries underdeveloped with depriving factors such as corruption, low education, poor health care system, hunger,

superstition and dogmas, dilapidated infrastructures, religious fanaticism and restiveness. Most underdeveloped countries are religious as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: Percentage Saying They Think of Themselves as Religious Persons

Countries	Number of Religious Persons(%)
Ghana	96
Nigeria	93
Armenia	92
Fiji	92
Macedonia	90
Romania	89
Iraq	88
Kenya	88
Peru	86
Brazil	85

Source: WIN-Gallup, 2012

Table 3: Percentage Thinking Themselves as Religious Person

Countries	Number of Religious Persons (%)
China	14
Japan	16
Czech Republic	20
France	37
Korea, Rep. (South)	52
Germany	51
Netherlands	43
Austria	42
Iceland	57
Australia	37
Ireland	47

Source: WIN-Gallup, 2012

In contrast to table 2, First World and Second World Countries emphasis less religiosity (see Table: 3) and projects characteristics of socio-economic wellbeing such as equality, less corruption, functional healthcare system, emphasis on science and technology, and less inclination to superstition and disdain for science and dogmatic ideas. It is therefore not surprising to see China and Japan occupy the top spot position in Table 3. Richer countries tend to be less religious than poor countries [17]. The Chinese communist, Marxist-Leninist-Maoist atheism ideology, espoused that an improvement in the social condition of Chinese lead to decrease in the influence of religion. In the Japanese society, [10] opined that attachment to occupation in

place of religion is the basis of social support in the Japanese society. Implicitly, while the world's industrial hubs (China and Japan) embraced science and emphasized less inclination to religion, Third World Countries such as Nigeria are certain that religiosity will solve human underdevelopment challenges.

Religiosity and Poverty in Nigeria

The nexus between religiosity and poverty was captured in the works of Marx Weber's *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber's seminal considered two elements, namely:

1. The impulse to accumulate wealth
 2. The importance of frugal life style
- To promote capitalism, that is mass economic prosperity, the society requires a disciplined labour force and regular

investment of capital. The latter involves thrift and worldly asceticism. A society's development should not anchor on conspicuous consumption but prudent lifestyle. Despite Weber's seminal, the spirit of capitalism is non-existing in Nigeria, owing to class exploitation that sustains conspicuous the lifestyle of the upper religious elite.

Nigeria has the sixth largest Christian population in the world (87 million) and the fifth-largest Muslim population in the world (90 million) [4]. Nigeria's religiosity has not increased its socio-economic development. For instance, the [27] reported that 182.2 million Nigerians do not have access to education and health care. The United Nations' Development Program placed Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2018 at 0.534, that is, on a position of 158 among 189 countries of the world. If the 0.534 HDI value is discounted for inequality, it will lessen to 0.349 [21]. The [21] also revealed that 51.4 Nigerians are multidimensional poor, while an additional 16.8 percent are vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. The concentration of deprivation in Nigeria, which is the average deprivation score among people in multidimensional poverty, is pegged at 56.6 percent [29]. Implicitly, the more religious a society is, the farther it sinks into poverty, deprivation, low life expectancy and other indices of underdevelopment [12].

There are 23,640 health facilities in Nigeria [9] and life expectancy is 54 years and with over 90% at risk of malaria, while over 100 million cases are recorded annually with about 300,000 deaths [23]. The health sector also has major challenges including brain drain and obsolete working equipment. In the face of some challenges resulting from low investment in health, science and technology, Northern Nigeria - a Muslim-dominated region - spent over \$376,774,125 on sponsorship of Nigerian Muslims to Hajj [17]. Due to inability to afford the few standard medical care, the vulnerable class patronizes prayer houses for healing rather than hospitals, while

imams and pastors embark on regular medical tourism in the best health facilities in First and Second World countries.

There is more investment in religion and religious edifices than investment in productive firms among Nigerian religious organizations. David Oyedepo, the founder of Living Faith Church and Paul Eneche of the Dunamis International Gospel Center, built 50,000 and 100,000 seat auditoriums respectively. Eneche's building is believed to be the largest in the world and it is mainly funded from tithes, offerings and donations from low-income earner members. A cursory observation shows that the numbers of religious centers (Churches and Mosques) in Nigeria surpass the numbers of educational institutions. The expansion of religious centers correlates to commensurate increase in the wealth of religious elites. David Oyedepo, the founder of Winners Chapel, has a net worth of \$150 million (€120 million) made from chains of spiritual businesses, media outlets, church-owned universities and sales of spiritual books, making him one of the wealthiest pastors in the world [7]. Other celebrity pastors whose investments and worth in the Pentecostal religious industry include Chris Oyakhilome (\$30-\$50 million), Temitope Joshua (\$10 -\$15 million), Mathew Ashimolowo (\$6-\$10 million), and Chris Okotie (\$3million-\$10 million) [19]. Unlike their members, religious organizations are exempted from tax payments. Members yearn to be like their religious leaders and quickly fill up baskets with donations during the first, second and third church services. The [29] reported that in some churches, a bottle of blessed *anointed* olive oil sells for as much as \$5 per month. Other economic-generating ventures include media houses, exorbitant tertiary institutions and proceeds from sales of literatures depicting secrets of growing wealth. Among Islamic adherents, preachers and religious opinion leaders have committed themselves towards the sustenance of intergenerational poverty through

fatalism and fundamentalism [13]. Mosques have become a breeding ground for jihadist and subtle political campaign avenues. Political elites utilize the influence of Imams to wipe up anti-ethnic and religious sentiments on the need to keep Muslims in political power. This is fundamentally achieved through commitments in building more Mosques than schools for the vulnerable poor.

Many Nigerians are poor. A [2] estimated that 182.2 million Nigerians have low access to education and healthcare. The country's dilapidated social infrastructures such as bad roads, epileptic power supply and moribund transportation network discourage local and foreign investments. Political leadership is determined by ethno-religious sentiments irrespective of mass-poverty level. But why are Nigerians poor? Why does deprivation linger despite people's claim to relationship with supernatural forces? The answer is simple. The remedy for pain is painkiller. Poverty is pain, and religion soothes poverty. Religions make the poor feel bad about their conditions but assure them of a better future. [15] remarked that "the most impoverished people are often told their reward is in heaven and they should be thankful for being alive." This enables the poor to escape the realities of their conditions and embrace their destiny.

German sociologist, [10] documented the functionality of religion to human society when he argued that, the protestant ethics stimulated the spirit of capitalism. That is, religious ethics promoted the *spirit of piety*, hard-work which gave rise to thrift and accumulation of wealth and investment that leads to economic growth. Weber's novel work did not envisage that the rise of capitalism would give birth to a new class of religious *Pastorpreneurs* and *Imampreneurs* who connive with the political class to keep the deprived class in religious servitude by unconsciously decimating their quest for quality education. People with low education and intelligent quotients do not understand realities. They are more deprived than others and have less

control over their fate. The implication is that, the greater the deprivation, the greater the poverty level. The poorer a country's population is, the greater it will be exploited by its religious and political class. This is why low-income earners, unemployed, uneducated and the emotionally unstable constitute the most religious social class [5].

A country's religiosity is also influenced by the level of religious tradition, deprivation and uncertainties found among its citizens. The greater the uncertainties, the more religious a society become. This accounts for Nigeria's high religiosity. The poor are consoled by promises of rapture and eternal bliss, while concepts such as, hell fire and the wrath of God are used against people who challenge the authority of religious leaders, religious doctrines and dogmas. Religious leaders reinforce the belief that the world will soon come to an end and the righteous will live in eternal bliss where sufferings and sorrow shall no longer exist. Sermons that extol the absolute power of God reinforce fear and subservience to *anointed* preachers and the established social, political and economic order.

No doubt, education and cognitive orientation are major tools for social change. A major strategy of keeping the poor in perpetual fear and submission to existing social order is by constantly reinforcing apocalyptic sermons on the dangers of challenging God's servants and the need to spread the message of expansion through financial contributions towards building more religious centers, but with limited access to quality education that challenges science. [18] opined that, this strategy is most appropriate because religious and political elites understand that, improved education enables the educated class to comprehend strategies for upward social mobility [23]. Systematic effort aimed at reducing access to quality education is manifest in low budgetary allocations to the education sector. In place of accessible quality education, churches and mosques have invested in education

by building tertiary schools all over the country. These schools are expensive and unaffordable to the lower socio-economic class whose tithes, offerings, and donations were used in its establishment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Religion is functional to social existence and persistence. However, it is dysfunctional in underdeveloped Third World Countries like Nigeria, where its extreme forms - religiosity leading to violent religious conflicts where many people have been killed, maimed and wide spread disruption of economic activities with negative effects on productivity with. Hundreds of churches and mosques, hotels and other related business as well as vehicles, private homes etc, have been destroyed leading to under development and poverty. Again as a tool for maintaining economic subservience of the religious elites over members of the lower class. Class subservience has been achieved and sustained through low investment in quality education. This is because quality education stimulates scientific inquiry

and technology. Religious leaders understand that, lower access to quality education encourages ignorance, dogmatism and religiosity that are needed to sustain class dominance.

Technology promotes secularity. Secularity is the precursor for economic prosperity and economic liberation reduces the relevance of religiosity in the society. Therefore, this paper concludes that the requisite spirit of capitalism cannot be realized in the absence of requisite cognitive reorientation which deemphasizes the supremacy of religious dogmas over scientific enquiry, thoughtfulness over prayers and the un-questionable 'anointing' status of the actions and teachings of religious leaders. Based on the foregoing, this paper recommends that investment in quality education and cognitive reorientation of the citizens are key approaches to save Nigeria from the brinks of religiosity and underdevelopment.

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