

**UNETHICAL RELIGIOSITY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN
CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA**

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Abstract

There is a continued spread of religious institutions in contemporary Nigeria. Different versions of Christian, Muslim and Traditional belief groups competing for wider recognition and followership in the Nigerian society do organize religious programs, social events and cultural festivals. Adherents of these three major religions in Nigeria are involved in the educational, economic, political, health, legal and social facets of the nation's life. In spite of the religious pedestal upon which these practitioners stand, the inhuman scheme of trafficking in persons persists in the country whether at source, transit and destination points. This work employed the qualitative research method of Life World Analysis and the reviewing of relevant literature. Applying the principles of religious ethics as a standard of testing the motives of those involved in the human trafficking business, our research discovered that unethical religiosity among Nigerians is a key factor sustaining human trafficking in the country. This work recommends a thorough review of methods of assessing people, their occupation and attitude to work so as to avail various religious groups and leaders the necessary information needed for possible commendation or sanction of their adherents as the case may be.

Keywords: Unethical, Religiosity, Inhuman, Human trafficking, Adherents, Ethics.

Background

Human activity, in line with the plan of the Creator of the Universe, is to be engaged in with the aim of sustaining and improving life for mankind and his entire environment. Thus, every pursuit of life that could be deemed appropriate should be such that exudes an atmosphere of cordiality in the relationship that exists between the natural and the supernatural realms of existence. It is this quest of a mutual relationship between the physical and the spiritual world that undergirds religious practices. Okwueze affirms this idea in his submission: "Religion can, therefore, be understood as a regulated pattern of life of a people in which experiences, beliefs and knowledge are reflected in man's conception of himself in relation to others, his social world, the physical as well as the metaphysical world" (3).

An important element in defining religion captured in the above definition is *regulated pattern*. Variations in patterns of regulating relationship of man with his physical and spiritual world are factors that contribute to multiple religious beliefs. Regulation on its part implies rules of conduct. This brings in the idea of ethics and its operational relationship to religion. Holmes intimates that ethics is about good and right concerning values and actions (10). He expatiates further that ethics is more concerned about what ought to be done and what values ought to be than what is being done and valued. Regulations that pattern relationships need to be ethically good and right. God in His expressions of love left for mankind an ethical code for good and right morals. This moral code which is called the Ten Commandments is fully outlined in Exodus 20:3-17.

Every religion claims to exist for the good of mankind. By this claim, every religion seeks to attract followers, promising to make life better for them now, in the future or in both phases. Nigeria has myriads of her citizens and dwellers in three major religions and few others in religious expressions prominent elsewhere in the world.

Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion which are the major religious expressions in the country all profess moral purity for mankind. They all believe in the Creator-God as the Supreme Being with omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence and immutability as His attributes. In spite of the affinities and proclamations these religions claim and express, about God, the conduct of some of their adherents speak to the contrary. When a dehumanizing business such as human trafficking thrives in a country like Nigeria to the point where a prominent Traditional Monarch, the Oba of Benin, points accusing fingers to some church leaders (Ibileke), one, in acknowledging the saying that "there is no smoke without fire", will not hesitate to believe his statement. Considering the harm and injury which is brought upon the human rights of people who are trafficked, one rightly questions the ethical foundation of religious leaders and their members who engage in human trafficking.

I. Human Trafficking.

The United Nations General Assembly in the year 2000 adopted what is known as the Palermo Protocol's definition of human trafficking. Thus, it is defined as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or

other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation". What is Human Trafficking? The United States Department of Homeland Security asserts that human trafficking is modern-day slavery that uses force, or coercion to subject people to different types of labour including commercial sex (U.S. Department of Homeland Security).

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) which oversees the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) intimates that almost all the countries of the world are affected by the human trafficking menace. A country, according to this body's submission, is entangled either as one or all of three points namely: origin, transit or destination, of victims of human trafficking (UNODC). This intimation of UNODC underscores the fact that slavery as it was in the past, is latently developing around the world and if unchecked, may blossom to a catastrophic level. Intimating on the past, Burns notes that slaves were gotten through agricultural servitude, war captives and kidnap victims and that it constituted both ethnic and social apartheid which subjected its victims to sufferings of various magnitudes (565, 759).

Today in Nigeria, all the means of enslaving people as is contained in the Trafficking in Persons Protocol could be seen at work. Whether the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim, they could be identified singly or in combined applications for enslavement. A case in point is the lamentation of Nigeria's Senate President, Olubukola Saraki, who affirms that "Nigeria is one of the countries with the highest number of slaves" (Iroanusi, Premium Times).

II. Levels of Human Trafficking

There are various reasons why people demand for slaves and this leads to different categories of human trafficking. Onyemenam avers that the accepted practice of a king or a prominent person receiving, harbouring and maintaining a sizeable number of domestic servants either for the pleasure of it or for manual labour, gives room for human trafficking (Human Trafficking: Its Problems in the Society). He further intimates that while the traffickers engage in the act mainly for economic gain, the buyers subject their human procurements to prostitution, child labour or drug carriage. This shows that there are local and international dimensions to human trafficking.

A. Local Operations in Nigeria

A careful observation of some homes, restaurants, workshops, market stalls and farm settlements will reveal some intimidating facts about modern-day slavery which is a part of human trafficking. People go to parents or guardians of children who in their economic misery are in dire need of survival, promise them a buoyant relief of their burden if they will release their children to them (Usman, Vanguard Online). These needy parents, due to

ignorance of what will befall their children, give them to the well-to-do who take them to urban areas and subject them to servitude as house helps or commercial helps of sort without recourse to their human rights and dignity. Such parents and guardians are given pittance to succor them. Some of these masters and mistresses, who draft these victims from their owners to their places of operation, often transfer them to other people without caring to know about their fate. There had been instances where truck-loads of children were intercepted by security operatives on Nigerian highways. In these local applications, Nigeria serves in all three categories as human trafficking point of origin, transit and destination. These acts are grossly perpetrated due mainly to ignorance or deliberate neglect of the religious ethics that exist for proper relationship between man and his physical, social as well as the spiritual world.

B. International Operations

Nigeria noticeably serves as a point of origin in international human trafficking business. Methods of recruitment are chiefly deceptive and fraudulent. An Igbo adage states: “*onye noro ebe o no, ebe o n’anoghi an’agu ya*”; that is, “when one resides in a particular vicinity, he begins to crave for where he does not reside.” Usually the reason for the craving implied in the adage is the belief that the desired place is better with regards to supplies for enjoyable life than the present station of the one involved. It is this belief that those involved in the business of trafficking in persons capitalize on to deceive and or defraud their victims. Some radio stations run commercials for people and organizations who promise to take Nigerians to foreign countries such as Italy, U.S.A, England, Germany, Portugal, Thailand, etc. for lucrative employment. In order to sound genuine these days, they state sums of money to be paid to obtain forms that need to be filled before screening exercises take place. The clandestine approach which they also employ is to subject would-be captives to oath-taking in juju shrines to make sure they do not run away or expose them to security operatives (Young, The Modern-Day Slavery in Nigeria is Human Trafficking).

III. Motives that Breed the Act of Human Trafficking

There is an Igbo adage that states: “*obu ihe mere ngu, ngu jiri me oba, oba jiri mee mkpotu*”; that is, it is something that triggered the curtain for it to trigger the bowl thereby causing the bowl to produce a shifting sound”. Human trafficking is caused by unethical desires for better life on the part of both the victims and the traffickers.

A. Motives of those trafficked

In his submission on why Nigerians migrate to other places to engage in undesirable practices such as Prostitution and Menial Job Slaves, D’Souza who mentions Italy specifically as a destination point, cites poverty. In this vein, it could be said that Nigerians, in a desperate attempt to climb the economic ladder of life, jump at opportunities without minding the details. The mere mention of taking somebody to another country where the victims are told there exist better job opportunities, better living standards and higher income propensities, sparks up an undeterred quest to travel out. Pride plays a great role in these hasty decisions. Nigerians like to compete with their age-mates, school-mates, class-mates and friends. They

crave to ride posh and flashy cars both abroad and at home, build the latest architectural piece, wear designer's shoes and clothes and splash cash during festivals for the crowd to applaud them. These and other flamboyant desires motivate many young Nigerians to ruin.

B. Motives of the traffickers

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, human trafficking business gives its perpetrators returns of billions of dollars as annual profit. This makes the business second only to drug trafficking, in terms of cross-border crimes (Blue Campaign). That means economic gain is a chief factor that propels those who engage in human trafficking. Some parents, guardians, relatives and friends who are grass-root propellers of this act, aim at getting money or other favour from those they give their children and wards to. Hatred as a result of envy also lead people to traffic their fellow human beings. White gives a succinct example by averring that though Joseph was trustworthy to God and his honesty a testimony to real faith, Satan in the quest to obliterate his light pricked his brothers through envy and caused them to traffic him as a slave to the heathen (Patriarchs and Prophets, 332). This proves that people can plot to undo their brothers, sisters, neighbors, friends, etc, thus pushing them into slavery either within or outside Nigeria. They employ the antic of good wishes for better days ahead to lure their victims just to get them away from home in order to take over one landed property or the other. In some cases, it is meant to remove such people from a competitive environment. Thus, traffickers and their surrogates could employ this business trick to rid-off an enemy or a perceived challenger.

IV. Principles of Religious Ethics

Due to the outward religious nature of Nigerians as shown by Grim who submits that, of the estimated 186.99 million people in the country, 46.3% are Christians, 46% Muslims, 7.4% Traditionalists and 0.3% other religious expressions, it is important to look at religious ethics and subsequently test the religiosity of Nigerians by its principles. The University of Chicago Divinity School intimates that religious ethics deal with the meaning, merits and authenticity of religious practices for the lives of people and all in their environment in line with orderliness of societies and ecosystems. Orderliness in a world where people think freely could be difficult to achieve. This is why God the Creator of the Universe gave laws to guide man and nature. In realization of the importance of natural law, Cicero, as cited by Burns, asserts that "True law, is right reason consonant with nature, diffused among all men, constant, eternal. To make enactments infringing this law, religion forbids, neither may it be repealed even in part, nor have we power through Senate or People to free ourselves from it" (259). Contributing to the idea of religious ethics, an online site, (stolaf.edu) intones that it concerns pronouncements and actions that are "right or wrong, good or bad, virtuous or vicious" in the view of religion. Expatriating further on ethical behavior, Okwueze introduces the mental aspect of life by averring that reflective evaluation or prescription of conduct is a constant ethical ingredient (2).

The principles which God has given to humanity for proper and orderly conduct written by His own finger (Exodus 31:18), is stated thus in Exodus 20: 3-17:

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man servant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's. (KJV)

These fundamental principles are basic to several other societal laws and professional rules of conduct. Corroborating this fact, Iwe states that “society is an ethical-juridical entity, hence the principle *‘ubi societas, ibi lex;* i.e. wherever a community exists, there also must be law” (Socio-Ethical Issues in Nigeria, 250). Human laws can only be right and good when they do not contravene God's law (Isaiah 8:20). The three major religions in Nigeria – Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion – profess and teach submission to God's will. The will of God revealed in the Ten Commandments are subsumed in Jesus' statement that people should love God and their neighbours (Mathew 22: 37-40). In proffering an answer to any probing mind as to how to love God and man, it is stated: “He hath shewed thee O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8 KJV). Therefore, these three principles of religious ethics – justice, mercy and humility – should be the pedestal upon which the moral, spiritual, social, physical and economic conduct of people (Nigerians inclusive) should stand.

V. Applying the Principles of Religious Ethics to the Motives of:

A. The human traffickers

As was shown earlier, the main motive of traffickers is economic. They sell their victims to people who use them exploitatively as labourers, house helps, sex workers, pornographic actors, body parts donors, child soldiers and suicide bombers (Young). Justice is a judicial term which mirrors the appropriateness of an action based on extant laws. God's law is eternal; hence it is always applicable to human conduct. Commenting on the religious ethics of Nigeria's three major religions, Iwe notes that African traditional ethics emphasizes personal righteousness with a strict sense of justice. He also states that Christian ethics hinges holistically on love of God and man as is enshrined in the Bible, while Islamic ethics emphasizes self-discipline, submission to the will of Allah and social justice (The Inseparable Social Trinity, 20). Based on all these intimations, it is obvious that human trafficking is an unjust activity both ethically and religiously.

Mercifulness requires love and cannot, in the least, allow injury to the one whom it is shown. Tricking one into dehumanizing labour for selfish economic gain is a mockery to the claim of paradise which traffickers make to the needy and their parents in a bid to snatch them from freedom and subject them to bondage. Humility that stems from the fear of God and a walk with him should be such that upholds the dignity of the human being. This is because as Iwe puts it, every reasonable human being asks fundamental religious questions about human existence such as on the origin of man, the purpose and aim of living as well as the culminating point of man's restlessness and seeming insatiability even in the midst of plenty that is acknowledged by many (The Dignity...Rights, 27).

Economic buoyancy resulting from human trafficking cannot pass for a humble wealth nor can it be divinely appreciable.

B. The victims of human trafficking

Victims of human trafficking include children, their parents or guardians, women and men who are lured to travel for greener pastures and the society at large that loses its manpower to foreign lands through these dehumanizing criminals called human traffickers. However, there is a need to evaluate the underlying desires that push people to fall victim of this menace. It is commonly said "look before you leap" But, to most Nigerians, the reverse order is better, hence, they leap before they look. The craze for economic fortune deadens the mind against such biblical counsels as: seek ye God's kingdom first, watch and pray to avoid falling into temptation and be satisfied with what you have (Matthew 6:33; 26:41; Hebrews 13:5). When a creature contemplates an action and furthers to carry it out without seeking his or her Creator, there is no justification for such a move. There is a proverb in Igbo that says "*onye buru chi ya uzo o gbagburu onwe-ya na oso*", that is, whosoever decides to move ahead of his or her God will run to self-exhaustion.

Those who jump at opportunities to travel for better life without consulting God for direction do not show mercy to themselves, let alone to their parents, friends, relatives and the larger society to which they belong. Parents and guardians who fail to consult God through committed prayer and fasting which is a man's privilege to talk to God as to a friend (White,

Steps to Christ, 95), before releasing their children, relatives or wards are not merciful to them. All human beings are God's stewards (Genesis 1:26, 28). Stewards prove their humility in serving their masters by being obedient to the instructions given them by those masters. This is not the case with most victims of human trafficking in contemporary Nigeria. If Nigerians humble themselves in their walk with God, their desires will be met by divine providence and none will successfully trick them. White captures this view aright by submitting that "All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses" (The Desire of Ages, 668). The persistent quest for wealth and economic well-being outside of God smacks of unethical religiosity because it lacks the religio-ethical principles of justice, mercy and humility. It results in unnecessary hardship, the type human trafficking victims face.

VI. Societal Reactions to Human Trafficking

Owing to the fact that human trafficking strikes at the core of the dignity of man, societal out-cry frequently greets its exposure to public domain. Various segments of society, be it cultural, political, religious or educational, have been decrying it. The problem, however, is the level of commitment of these societal organs to curb human trafficking. In her submission, Leary calls for both a worldwide solution and local actions (Catholic University of America...Paper). Here in Nigeria, the government of Edo State has begun a state-wide tracking of those involved in the human trafficking cartels that operate within its territory. Furthermore, the government has planned to include a new curriculum for social studies that will enlighten its pupils and students on the dangers of falling prey to those empty promises of greener pastures abroad (Ihonvbere).

To make real its effort at eradicating the human trafficking scourge, the wife of the Edo State Governor Mrs. Betsy Obaseki and the state's Commissioner for Arts, Culture and Diaspora Affairs, Honorable Osaze Osemwegie-Ero have resorted to grassroots campaigns. They went to an interior town called Iguemokhua to sensitize the people on the dangers of illegal migration. To help keep the people busy, a market was renovated and commissioned for the people's commercial activities to boom. They made available to the teenagers, parents and community heads printed information leaflets in addition to oral counsels against indulging in the human trafficking business (Omoregbe). At the national level, efforts of government are beginning to surface.

Onyeji brings to the fore the activities of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). He intimates that the agency has gone as far as engaging the services of local witch doctors in Benin to help it reduce the act of trafficking in persons as the city ranks highest in such activities in Nigeria (Premium Times, February 5, 2018). Given the high rate of the activities of human traffickers in Nigeria, societal reprimands should be evoked on the perpetrators. As Iwe puts it, since positive acts deserve accolades,

negative acts also deserve condemnation (Socio-Ethical ... Nigeria, 250). This calls for a careful appraisal of people's occupation and means of wealth. Every available positive apparatus of government and social/religious institutions should be employed to fight against this menace in Nigeria.

VII. The Role of Religious Language in Curbing Human Trafficking in Nigeria

To key-in the vantage position of religion in helping to diffuse human trafficking, Potrafke's statements need mentioning. He asserts that:

Because many of the victims are women and combating human trafficking reinforces human rights, cultural traits and religion are likely to influence policies against human trafficking. Religion has been shown to influence human development and economic policy-making. Religion influences, for example, gender equality: in the education system and the labour market... Religion has also been shown to influence political institutions which, in turn, influence human development and economic policies ... Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous religions ... five major religion groups (2).

The submissions of Potrafke is a challenge to the three major religions in Nigeria to come out and use their potentials to right the wrong of human trafficking in the country. Just as religion has positive impacts on policies in the education, economic and political spheres, it can do same in the social sphere, especially as it affects human trafficking. Religion has the moral right and obligation to fight human trafficking. Potrafke affirms that Christian and Islamic laws and beliefs denounce human trafficking because it ruins sexual purity and human dignity (3). He goes down memory lane to spot the efforts of William Wilberforce, a British parliamentarian who, after he was converted to Christianity, campaigned vehemently against slave trade. The effort paid off as Acts of Parliament were later passed to abolish slavery in England in 1837. He also intimates that, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the social purity movements campaigned and were later followed in the 20th century by religious freedom movements in campaigns that gave birth to the 21st century anti-trafficking groups (3).

Religious organizations in Nigeria need to use ample time during their congregational meetings for worship, studies and prayer to denounce human trafficking. Expositions on prosperity should be properly tailored to avoid wrong signals and impressions that only the affluent and well-to-do are blessed of God. The virtues outlined in the Sermon on the Mount which include "Purity, innocence, gentility, patience and long-suffering, justice, spiritual detachment, meekness, honesty and the spirit of peace make it clear that the Christian way of life centered on love, as it is, is not a soft option, but a challenge to the world and a call to courageous living (Iwe Socio- Ethical ... Nigeria, 101). A constant reminder to worshipers that ill-gotten wealth cannot receive expiation from its contamination should be made in clear and loud voices. Individual members of the various religious persuasions should be reminded of personal accountability on the judgment day. Hard work and total dependence on God for success and the spirit of contentment with what God approves for each individual should be

expressly encouraged. The special public recognition of money-bags in religious gatherings should be discountenanced.

VIII. Conclusion

It is obvious that human traffickers and most of their victims have materialistic inclinations. Whereas the inclinations of the traffickers are culpable, those of their victims are gullible. The needy in the society need to be thoroughly enlightened in line with religious ethics to enable them recognize God in all their desires. This is because any contrary tendency would pave the way for unquantifiable pain. Kasser warns that “Materialistic values are associated with a pervasive undermining of people’s well-being, from low life satisfaction and happiness, to depression and anxiety, to physical problems such as headaches, and to personality disorders, narcissism and antisocial behavior” (22). The traffickers should be informed that God the Creator and Owner of all mankind is omnipresent, omniscience, omnipotent, and immutable, meaning that He is everywhere, knows everything, has all power and does not change. He will one day in future give to every human being his due reward in accordance to his beliefs and actions in the here and now.

Given the fact that over 90 per cent of Nigerians are adherents of one or more of the three major religions in the country, leaders of these various religious bodies should re-evaluate the ethical foundations of their religious followers as well as those of themselves. The craze for and unnecessary display of wealth and affluence should receive the query “what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8: 36). The moral law of God, the Ten Commandments and the religio-ethical principles of justice, mercy and humility should be ever in focus for a sound socio- economic and a proper religio-political lifestyle. These are all necessary to curb human trafficking in Nigeria because the economic quest that drives human traffickers and their victims in spite of their religious horizon suffers from unethical religiosity.

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