

*Full Length Research Paper*

## The role of religion in modern society: Masses opium or tool for development: A Case Study of Saw-Mill Area, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

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This paper discusses the role of religion in modern society. Religion no doubt in the perception of faithful is truly the opium of the masses, it cushions the effects of living in a problem-stricken world characterized by faithlessness and hopelessness. It is the task of religion, once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of the world. It is the immediate task of philosophy, which is in the service of religion to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked; religion provides a vent and creates a disconnect between man and hopelessness while reminding us of a life in the hereafter, it absorbs the heart of the pounds of suffering, and puts on man a garb of hope which will get to be shown off on the spiritual and mundane runway. The data used in the study are derived from three sources: a structured questionnaire, documentary sources, and direct observation. The findings revealed that religion as a tool for integration has played more divisive roles than integrating roles and that either in terms of its facilities, personnel, or programs, religion is not predisposed to performing the original function it set out to accomplish. After making short and long term recommendations, it was concluded that, in order for religion to effectively discharge its responsibilities, fundamental steps must be taken to control the socio-psychological basis of religion.

**Key words:** Religion; Society: Masses: Opium; Development.

### INTRODUCTION

Religion is found in all known human societies. Even the earliest societies on record show clear traces of religious symbols and ceremonies. Throughout history, religion has continued to be a central part of societies and human experience, shaping how individuals react to the environments in which they live. Since religion is such an important part of societies around the world, sociologists are very interested in studying it. Sociologists study religion as both a belief system and a social institution. As a belief system, religion shapes what people think and how they see the world. As a social institution, religion is a pattern of social action organized around the beliefs

and practices that people develop to answer questions about the meaning of existence. As an institution, religion persists over time and has an organizational structure into which members are socialized. In studying religion from a sociological perspective, it is not important what one believes about religion. What is important is the ability to examine religion objectively in its social and cultural context. Modern academic sociology began with the study of religion in Emile Durkheim's 1897 *The Study of Suicide* in which he explored the differing suicide rates among Protestants and Catholics (Adeyemo, 2002). Following Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber also

looked at religion's role and influence in other social institutions such as economics and politics. Each major sociological framework has its perspective on religion. For instance, from the functionalist perspective of sociological theory, religion is an integrative force in society because it has the power to shape collective beliefs. It provides cohesion in the social order by promoting a sense of belonging and collective consciousness.

This view was supported by Emile Durkheim. A second point of view, supported by Max Weber, views religion in terms of how it supports other social institutions. Weber thought that the religious belief systems provided a cultural framework that supported the development of other social institutions, such as the economy. While Durkheim and Weber concentrated on how religion contributes to the cohesion of society, Karl Marx focused on the conflict and oppression that religion provided to societies. Marx saw religion as a tool for class oppression in which it promotes stratification because it supports a hierarchy of people on Earth and the subordination of humankind to divine authority.

The role of religion is ambivalent and the practice is considered indispensable in the social space inhabited by man; it has dominated the invisible and impalpable vortex of issues; it is a tool for economic exploitation and social oppression and also a divisive tool that splits the fabric of nationhood through group imposed consciousness that sets the delineating standards on social boundaries. Attempt to foist group opinions and beliefs on non-conformist has sparked series of social upheavals which in most cases terminate in colossal loss of lives and properties. The role of religion will to a large extent be determined by the social milieu, religious doctrines, and the personality of leaders; religion has presented a poisoned chalice to followers who get committed to its cause. Followers have constantly revolved round the orbit of penury while religious leaders basked in stolen affluence. Religion presents a sedative effect with an escapists impact on followers; man is seen as an arbitrary and impulsive creation of a supreme being who controls the universe and decides the fate of men; the creator of all creations spells out modalities and acceptable codes required for existence in the transient world before mortal transcends through a grand initiation known as death to the life in the hereafter.

Many religious leaders have taken advantage of the eternal provisions to cajole and milk followers of their hard earned money. According to Adeyemo (2002), followers are afraid of going in fear of abstractions, but in Marxists paradigm anything which spouts lots of the masses or the truth, anything which says follow the leader, which says the individual does not count in favour of some 'greater good' is most likely spouted by someone who wants power over you, or someone who has already submitted to similar claptrap spouted by somebody else, like a pathetic pyramid sales scam (Alexander, 1997).

For Marx, economics is what constitutes the base of all of human life and history, generating division of labor, class struggle, and all the social institutions which are supposed to maintain the status quo. Those social institutions are a superstructure built upon the base of economics, totally dependent upon material and economic realities but nothing else. All of the institutions which are prominent in our daily lives — marriage, church, government, arts, etc, can only be truly understood when examined in relation to economic forces. According to Marx, religion is one of those social institutions which are dependent upon the material and economic realities in a given society. It has no independent history but is instead the creature of productive forces.

Berry (1997) reproduced the work of Marx, when he opined that the religious world is but the reflex of the real world. Religion is indeed man's self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself. The state and the society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world: its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality.

Religion simultaneously serves as the opium of the masses and also a tool for development but the opium impact is more pronounced than the development impulse given by religion.

### Conceptual clarifications

**RELIGION:** According to Chonko (1992), religion is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and world views that establishe symbols that relate humanity to some supernatural or inanimate objects who are revered and worshipped through ritual practices and there exists a code of existence that guides adherents on the why and how of social existence; an icon is formed and harmonized as the rallying point of faithfuls and it could include sun, moon, river, fire or some animate personalities. Armentor (1995) made an unequivocal historical that the oldest religions include Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, Bahal, Taoism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Shinto e.t.c

**OPIUM:** This is an air-dried milky exudation from unripe capsules of *Papaver somniferum* and *P.album* (the opium poppies). It contains some 25 alkaloids; the most important being codein, morphine (from which Heroin is derived), NOSCAVINE, PAPAVERINE and THEBAIN all of which can be used for their narcotic and analgesic effects. Opium is poisonous in large doses; because it is highly addictive, production and cultivation of the poppies

is prohibited by most nations by international agreement, and its sales or possession for other than medical uses is strictly prohibited by federal, state and local laws. (Berry 2002)

**DEVELOPMENT:** DeCreamer (2003) conceived of development as a qualitative increase in the living standard of a defined group of people; it translates to leading healthy lives, being knowledgeable, having access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and being able to participate in the life of the community

### Opium as a metaphor

Edwards (1999) alluded to historical and philosophical statement: "Religion is the opium of the people"; it is one of the most frequently paraphrased statements of Karl Marx.

It was translated from the German original, "*Die Religion ... ist das Opium des Volkes*" and is often referred to as "religion is the opiate of the masses." The quotation originates from the introduction of his 1843 work *Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* which was subsequently released one year later in Marx's own journal *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, a collaboration with Arnold Ruge.

The phrase "This opium you feed your people" appears in 1797 in Marquis de Sade's text *L'Histoire de Juliette*. This has been translated variously as 'religion is the opiate of the masses', 'religion is the opium of the masses' and, in a version which German scholars prefer 'religion is the opium of the people'.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data used in this paper were generated from Saw-Mill area, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, located in the heart of the metropolis of Ilorin. As at the time of the field work, Saw-Mill area is a densely populated area in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, which proved suitably for the research objective. Stratified sampling was used to choose 62 respondents.

Methods of data collection were employed, namely: (1) Direct observation, (2) Secondary sources (3) Questionnaire. More information was obtained through secondary sources. While the data collected via direct observation and secondary sources were analyzed qualitatively, the data collected through questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively.

### DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS

The data in Table 1 show that a typical resident in Saw-Mill area Ilorin, Nigeria is in the prime of his life (18-29 years). He is most likely single and has secondary education; he is either unemployed or self employed (or apprentice) in the lowest occupational ladder. The bulk of the respondents basically practice Islam (72.4%), while

**Table 1.** Social demographic characteristics of respondents N = 62.

Age	Relative frequency (%)
18-23	46.2
24-29	31.8
30 years and above	22
Gender	
	Relative frequency (%)
Male	93.54
Female	6.45
Religion	
	Relative frequency (%)
Christianity	24.8
Islam	72.4
Others	2.8
Educational Attainment	
	Relative frequency (%)
No formal education	19.5
Primary/Koranic	38.5
Secondary	39.3
Tertiary	2.7
Employment status	
	Relative frequency (%)
Unemployed	56.6
Self-Employed	42.0
Civil Servants	1.4
Total	64

Source: Researcher's Field Work 2013.

24.8% are Christians and 2.8 practice other religions. Thus, it is clear that a typical resident in Saw-Mill Area Ilorin, Nigeria is a member of the lower socio-economic class in the contemporary Nigerian society.

The concept of religion went un-criticized in the demonological era and metaphysical stages of human social existence. Religion as an abstract concept enjoins all to cast their cares and burdens on the supreme beings who oversee the affairs of men.

The political strength-hold of religious leaders and their over-reaching influence during the theological stage of human social evolution suppressed the emergence of religious criticism but in the 18th and 19th centuries, a more naturalistic approach developed. One person who attempted to examine religion from an objective, scientific perspective was Karl Marx.

Marx's analysis and critique of religion is perhaps one of the most famous and most quoted by theist and atheist alike.

Fajana (2000) observed that Marx actually said very little about religion directly; in all of his writings, he hardly ever addresses religion in a systematic fashion; even

**Table 2.** Respondents' opinion of the objectives of religion.

Responses	Relative frequency (%)
Oppression	64.6
Reform/Prepare adherents for paradise	22.6
Others	12.8
Total	62

Source: Researcher's Field Work 2013.

though he touches on it frequently in books, speeches and pamphlets, his critique of religion forms simply one piece of his overall theory of society. According to Marx, religion is an expression of material realities and economic injustice. Thus, problems in religion are ultimately problems in society. Religion is not the disease, but merely a symptom. It is used by oppressors to make people feel better about the distress they experience due to being poor and exploited.

### Religion as an opium in modern society (negative role)

#### Religion and social oppression

The data reveal that 64.6% of the respondents were of the opinion that religion is an instrument of oppression. Only 22.6% perceive religion as preparing adherents for a life in the hereafter.

These findings show that majority of the respondent (64.6%) hold a negative opinion about the objective of religion. Respondents believe that the main objective of religion in Nigerian is to oppress the poor people (Table 2).

These finding indicate that there is a divergence between religious policy and respondent' opinion as to the objectives of the prison. While religious policy is said to be the pursuit of a glorious life in the hereafter, religious adherents see things differently. Furthermore, religious adherents assessed religious leaders in relation to their integrity and incorruptibility. In all, 43.2 % alleged that religious leaders are corrupt. While 27.4 percent maintain that religious leaders are bias along tribal and religious lines. 17.4% are of the view that whatever anomaly is observed among religious leaders is a reflection of the whole society and religious leaders must not be blamed for a problem created by the society as a whole.

These findings are interesting for two reasons. First, they suggest that religious adherents are aware of the corrupt practices going on in the world of religion. If adherents can afford huge stolen money, religious leaders will hold them in high esteem and continually pray for

them.

This finding corroborates Brockner (2010)'s observation that: "some religious officials ... constitute themselves into bankers for criminal adherent, helping criminal adherent to obtain contrabands, such as cigarettes and marijuana. In some cases, religious leaders serve as the link between the criminal and the outside world for a price."

In most societies social injustices have continued to thrive unabated, the elite have consistently unleashed mayhem and untold economic hardship on the masses, the indices of corruption has gained astronomical influence which further deepens the gulf between the haves and the have not. Religion has assumed a dangerous stand as a tool of oppression by the elite on the masses and masses on masses; it helps accentuate regional and ethnic distinctions, so many merciless human massacres have been witnessed which were occasioned by grievances premised on religious differences. Religious faithfuls use the parachute of religion to achieve a safe-landing in a frustrated world.

Religion is [the world's] general basis for consolation...The struggle against religion is...a struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of [people], is a demand for their real happiness (*Marx*).

Guest (1969) opined that violent subcultures and counter cultures have emerged, and the immediate fear is the political undertone these belligerent religious sects have towards challenging the existence of the federal government and calling for the abolition of institutional practices that have been in existence since the days of yores; the manner in which the demand of these extremists is tabled is confrontational and bloodthirsty. Several lives were lost in the vainglorious pursuit of their unjust argument. We have used the Christian Bible, Muslim quran, hindus veda e.t.c as if they are a mere special constable's handbook, an opium dose for keeping beasts of burden patient while they are overloaded.

**Table 3.** The Relationship between Gender and Respondents' view on if religious leaders are after their own wellbeing.

	No, religious leaders are after their own economic wellbeing %		Yes, religious leaders are not after their own economic wellbeing %		Total %	
Male	11	17.7	47	75.8	58	93.54
Female	4	6.45	0	0	4	6.45
Total	15	24.15	47	75.8	62	100

Source: Researcher's Field Work 2013.

The finding reveals that 24.15% of the respondents stated clearly that religious leaders are not after their own economic wellbeing, while 75.8% opined that religious leaders are basically after their own wellbeing leading to massive exploitation of the masses (Table 3).

According to Ayanniyi (1992), it is a gory sight witnessing the monumental decay that has engulfed our religious terrain; religious leaders including pastors and imams have converted religion to a damaged ATM that should spit money on demand. Pastors and imams have ascended an elite position in the society. Cases of misconduct and financial mismanagement have become a recurring decimal in religious circles.

They ride in posh cars and own massive mansions in both home and abroad while members of their congregation wallow in abject poverty. Regardless of the mighty cathedrals and imposing mansions, members of the congregation whose money was used to erect the imposing structures still live below the poverty bracket while pastors and imams boast of multi-million dollar empires. The only doctrine and scripture consistently held unto by religious leaders is the version of the holy book which says:

*give and it shall be given unto you, in good measures, press down, shaking together shall men give unto your bosom (Holy Bible)*

*Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith the lord of hosts, if I will not open you windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, there shall not be room enough to receive it (Malachi 3 vs 9-10).*

Leaders do not preach or teach the principles of wealth creation or development of investment mentalities; the sermon from the podium is give, and give with much emphasis on offerings and closeness to political looters. Brockner (2010)'s findings further corroborate the findings in this study, when he gave a list of Clerics in Nigeria as well as their network. Forbes rating of super rich pastors in Nigeria includes.

#### (i) Bishop David Oyedepo

Affiliation: Living Faith World Outreach Ministry, aka Winners Chapel

Estimated net worth: \$150 million

David Oyedepo is Nigeria's wealthiest preacher. Ever since he founded the Living Faith World Outreach Ministry in 1981, it has grown to become one of Africa's largest congregations. The Faith Tabernacle, where he hosts three services every Sunday, is Africa's largest worship center, with a seating capacity of 50,000. Oyedepo owns four private jets and homes in London and the United States. He also owns Dominion Publishing House, a thriving publishing company that publishes all his books (which are often centered on prosperity).

He founded and owns Covenant University, one of Nigeria's leading tertiary institutions, and Faith Academy, an elite high school.

#### (ii) Chris Oyakhilome

Church: Believers' Loveworld Ministries, a.k.a Christ Embassy

Estimated net worth: \$30 million - \$50 million

#### (iii) Temitope Joshua

Church: Synagogue Church Of All Nations [SCOAN]

Estimated net worth: \$10 million- \$15 million

#### (iv) Matthew Ashimolowo

Kingsway International Christian Centre [KICC]

Estimated net worth: \$6 million-\$10 million

#### (v) Chris Okotie

House of God Church

Net worth: \$3 million - \$10 million

Source: Brockner (2010) Religious Criminalization in Sub Sahara Africa

And within the Muslim fold, the super rich Islamic clerics include the following.

#### (i) Sheik Ahmad Abubakar Gumi

Estimated net worth: \$6 million-\$10 million

**(ii) Sheik Gazali Akewadola**

Net worth: \$2 million - \$8 million

Source: Brockner (2010) Religious Criminalization in Sub Sahara Africa

A number of Nigerian Muslim clerics and pastors own private jets in a country where a large chunk of the population live below a \$1.00 per day. It speaks of the monetization of the Christianity and other religions in Nigeria. In the real sense of it, Jesus was poor. He died poor that we may be rich. How then is it that leaders of churches are rich while the followers are poor? These pastors have transformed to a semi god. Before it used to be a poster of Jesus Christ, but now it is pictures of individuals; the celebrity posture pastors assume during religious campaigns is worrisome. Pentecostal churches are springing up in record numbers because of the prosperity sought by many poor; the number of denominations we have in Nigeria is not in any world.

**Religious sects and social violence****Boko haram impasse**

Flanders (1975) observed that religion is synonymous to militancy, weapons and ammunitions have become essential parts of religious apparels. The alqueda forces, the Israeli and Palestine, face off, the Afghanistan and Pakistan fracas, the blood thirsty boko haram are all cogent examples of religious nightmares. The boko haram impasse would be typified and expanded to capture the religious violence obtainable in the globe.

Chapman (2010) submitted that since boko haram came into limelight sometime in 2008, the Boko Haram phenomenon has wrought a lot of socio-economic havoc on Nigeria. With every attack, members of this dreaded sect inflict massive destruction that could take a long period and at enormous cost to fix. Lately, however, the Boko Haram phenomenon has begun to cause so much psychological stress to majority of citizens of Nigerian extraction.

This is as a result of the deliberate, nay mischievous, profiling of almost every person, especially the Muslim population, in this hitherto most peaceful country, as either instigating the sect or subtly encouraging its dastardly acts. boko Haram, figuratively, "Western education is a sin") is a Nigerian Islamist group that seeks the imposition of Shariah law throughout the whole of Nigeria. The group presently has an undefined structure and chain of command. The official name of the group is *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*, which in Arabic means People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad.

It became known internationally following sectarian violence in Nigeria in 2009. As of 2011 it is thought to

be responsible for increasingly violent and sophisticated attacks, with at least 327 people killed in 2011 through November 6 (Handy 2010). Boko Haram uses the bomb attacks in Nigeria as a strategy of tension. Its aim is to create tension and division in Nigeria.

Boko Haram has become a major problem for the country's peace, security, and stability, even if we do not want to accept that the fundamentalist group is not just about terror. The group is doing the country a lot of harm through its terror attacks. Beer parlour gossips project Boko Haram as an Islamist sect that has the nodding of leading northern political leaders. Religion has been captured by political elites and the religious masses are been tossed like soulless marionettes to whet the ego of the power thirsty political elites who take advantage of the political aperture to unleash wanton destruction of unquantifiable dimension through recasting all political problems in religious statement.

The cultural ideology of this group is unbelievable which includes the call for the abolition of secular Nigerian constitution and consequent sharianization and extension of Islamic jurisprudence over the entire country; also the opposition to western education by the sect is also a bold attempt to interrogate the philosophy of education that has been in existence since the Amalgamation of 1914 (Adeyemo, 2010)

Adeyemo (2010) went further to expound the basic beliefs of boko Haram. He advanced that boko haram opposes not only Western education, but Western culture and modern science as well. The group also forbids the wearing of shirts and pants and the act of voting in elections. In its view, the Nigerian state is run by non-believers. According to Mohammed Yusuf, the then leader of the sect,

*I would reject the fact that the earth is a sphere if it was contrary to Islamic teachings, along with Darwinism and the fact that rain comes from water evaporated by the sun (Mohammed Yusuf Bectuqart, 2008).*

This extremist religious sects have unleashed untold hardship on Nigerians and have retrogressed all economic efforts geared towards economic advancement and social emancipation; a huge number of policemen have been killed and they include SP F.U FAROUK 6 PMF Maiduguri, DSP AZUBUIKE, Inspector Haziell Audu, PC Hamidu Ijidenga, PC Joshua Garba, PC Samaila Ojo, Sgt. Adamu Idi, Sgt. Daniel Ekong, Sgt. Danjuma Bawa, Abdulmuinu Ngama, Sgt. Joseph Maku, Sgt. Mohammed Musa, SP. Mohammed Usman Faruk; other mayhems unleashed on Nigerians by this unrepentant religious apologists according to Brockner (2011) include.

On September 7, 2010, Boko Haram freed over 700 inmates from a prison in Bauchi State

On Friday January 28, 2011, the Borno State candidate

of the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) for the April 2011 gubernatorial elections was assassinated, along with his brother, four police officers and a 12-year old boy. The killing was politically motivated .

On April 1, Boko Haram members attacked a police station in Bauchi .

On April 9, a polling center in Maiduguri was bombed.

On April 15, the Maiduguri office of the Independent National Electoral Commission was bombed by members of boko haram, and several people were shot in a separate incident on the same day.

On April 20, Boko Haram killed a Muslim cleric and ambushed several police officers in Maiduguri.

On April 22, Boko Haram freed 14 prisoners during a jailbreak in Yola, Adamawa State

On June 17, 2011, the group attempted a bombing attack on the police force headquarters in Abuja; the attack was the first suicide bombing in Nigeria's history and it specifically targeted Police Inspector-General Hafiz Ringim.

On June 26, 2011, the sect carried out a bombing attack on a beer garden in Maiduguri; militants on motorcycles threw explosives into the drinking spot, killing about 25 people.

On June 27, 2011, another bombing in Maiduguri attributed to the group killed at least two girls and wounded three customs officials.

On July 03, 2011, a bombing in a beer garden in Maiduguri attributed to the group killed at least twenty people.

On July 10, 2011, a bombing at the All Christian Fellowship Church in Suleja, Niger State.

On August 12, 2011, a prominent Muslim Cleric Liman Bana was shot dead by Boko Haram. He died after sustaining gunshot wounds while walking home from conducting prayers at the main mosque in Ngala.

On August 26, the UN headquarters in Abuja was blown up by a suicide car bomber, leaving at least 21 dead and dozens more injured.

October 22, 2011: Spokesman Abu Qaqa indicated that the militant group had slain Alhaji Zakariya Isa, a Nigerian Television Authority journalist, claiming that he was a government informant.

November 5, 2011: A series of coordinated attacks in Borno and Yobe states, primarily around Damaturu killed at least 67 people, leaving a new police headquarters in ruins, and government offices burned. Source: Yesufu (2012): adapted from the book, *The dynamics of Spiritual Relations*.

### Religion and political exploitation

Religion has grown to become the manual for political exploitation in most nations of the World. Theology, as enshrined in the philosophical handout forbids religious

leaders from playing a participatory role in the political exploitation of the masses. Religious leaders have lost their pride of place as custodians of truth; political looters have seen a safe haven in places of religious worship. Resources are siphoned from the mundane world to the world of the sacred.

These monies so transferred in an unholy alliance constitute pollutants and erode the intended reverence for the supernatural being. Cases are rife of avaricious individuals who have been apprehended in places of religious worship on account of financial mismanagement of public or private funds entrusted in their care. Religious leaders are not exempted from the spree of religious jamboree as several church funds have been mis-managed by the highly placed religious leaders. Religion can be likened to an investment, and religious been the manager. Religion has de-emphasized.

### Religion as a tool for development (positive role)

#### Religion and social development

If Karl Marx provides us with an account in which religion serves merely as social opiate and agent of social control, Max Weber offers us a different vision, one in which religion can in some instances be an independent variable and, as such, a source of social change. The study of comparative religion forms a major part of Weber's program.

Weber's approach to religion and social change involves a particular conception of the relationship between interests (material and ideal) and ideas; some sociologists consider Weber's understanding of this relationship to be one of his most important contributions to the sociology of religion. Weber provides a description of this relationship, almost off-handedly, in a larger discussion of salvation and capitalism: "Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern [human] conduct. Weber's sociology of religion, nonetheless, is notable for its claims that religion can be a source of social change. Weber's work beyond *The Protestant Ethic* similarly focuses on the way that ideas act back on interests and shape activities, especially economic activities. For example, Weber views salvation as a key idea that drives action, noting that his "concern is essentially with the quest for salvation...insofar as it produced certain consequences for practical behavior in the world," particularly "a positive orientation to mundane affairs".

Weber begins *The Protestant Ethic* by noting an apparent association between certain religious affiliations (particularly Protestantism) and business success, and suggests that this association might indicate a causal connection between the two. He then goes on to characterize the "spirit of capitalism" by quoting a number

of passages from Benjamin Franklin's writing that he considers exemplary of this spirit in its purest, ideal-typical form. At the core of the spirit of capitalism is a work ethic in which any time spent not actually making money is wasted time. Franklin champions the pursuit of profit for its own sake, and by the most systematic and rational means possible. Weber identifies Franklin's approach, not as form of business practice, but as an ethos (or, as Weber describes it, an ethic). It is this ethic, claims Weber, that is specific to modern western capitalism, and it is based on Luther's idea of the calling or vocation. At this historical point in Weber's story, most of the key precursors to modern capitalism are in place. Popularization of the idea of the calling has drawn religious life out of the monastery and planted it in "the world."

Labeling religion as the "opium for the people" or the "opiate of the masses" is a fairly common tactic used by those dismissive of religion. Using phrases like this is a way to blow off religion without trying to counter or discuss it. Karl Marx was not the first to use this phrase, but he is linked with it when this attack is used. Marx's contention was that religion gives people artificial, illusory happiness like opium does to a drug addict and freeing people from that unrealistic illusion was part of building a better society.

Beginning primarily with Marx, the "opium for the masses" accusation is often used by atheists. Because they reject the existence of God, they have to somehow explain the continuing existence of religion. They see no need for religion, so they do not understand others' need for it. Marx was denouncing religion in general by using "people" in a demeaning sense to mean the poor, ignorant, and easily deceived. The essential argument of the "opium for the masses" saying is that religion is for weak-minded and emotionally disturbed people who need a crutch to get through life. Atheists today make similar claims, such as the idea that God is an imaginary friend for adult.

There are strong logical, scientific, and philosophical arguments for the existence of God. The fact that humanity is damaged and in need of redemption/salvation, the core message of religion is clearly seen throughout the world. In the history of humanity, the vast majority of the most intellectually brilliant writers and thinkers have been theists.

The data reveal that 64.6% of the respondents were of the opinion that religion performs social control functions. Only 22.6% perceive religion as not playing any role in social control (Table 4). These findings show that religion instill moral codes into the lives of adherents. The role of religion as a tool for social control cannot be overemphasized; several moral miscreants would have been let loose without the taming impact of religion it reinforces and mirror acceptable standards while directing faithfuls towards earning a place in the coveted

**Table 4.** Respondents' Opinion on if religion perform the function of social control.

Responses	Relative frequency (%)
Yes	64.6
No	22.6
don't know	12.8
Total	62

Source: Researcher's Field Work 2013.

life in the hereafter. Several callous hearts weaned on the diet of banditry have felt the need to forsake unbecoming acts that are not in tandem with societal standards. These have helped to contain deviant acts and consequently reconstitute the social foundations of the society.

Religion has contributed immensely to growth and development in the society and this contributions spans all domains of human endeavour. Religious institutions have swept out the debris of illiteracy through pronounced presence in the education sector; it is a fashionable trend for religious institutions to own universities, colleges and primary schools, it is an elite statement which all religious institutions have stirred hard to make. The cobweb of unemployment has not been left standing, as religious institutions have assisted immensely in mopping up the unemployment statistics through job creation.

The role of religion in nation building can also not be overemphasized; through sermons and teachings that are located in the premises of the need for moral rectitude, it has placed emphasis on the need for peaceful co-existence in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society through emphasis on tolerance. The hold of religion in our everyday existence is encompassing

### Observation

It has been observed that over the years that religiosity has waned if measured side by side with the growing influence of religion; the codes of conducts ingrained in the various religious codes have been left unheeded with a consequent impact of being left with shaft religion. So many adherents have lost touch with the eternal classical message and the mundane has replaced the sacred. The political undertone that characterizes most religious doctrines has clouded sense of judgment and adherents are forced draft into the world of excesses and extremism.

The value in religion is eroding gradually and what we have as followers are at best bunch of unrepentant criminals or at worst extremists who take delight in enforcing their own religious beliefs and doctrines on others who belong to different religious fold.



## Conclusion

Religion no doubt in the perception of faithfuls is truly the opium of the masses; it cushions the effects of living in a problem-stricken world characterized by faithlessness and hopelessness. It is the task of religion, once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of the world. It is the immediate task of philosophy, which is in the service of religion to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked; it provides a vent and creates a disconnect between man and hopelessness while reminding us of a life in the hereafter; it absorbs the heart of the pounds of suffering, and puts on man a garb of hope which will get to be shown off on the spiritual and mundane runway. Thus, the criticism of Heaven turns into the criticism of Earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics, because our existence is determined by a supernatural being who takes charge of the affairs of man.

On the other hand, religion has played a counter productive role in our society, which further stifles development. Religious theories have become negotiable at the intellectual market and consistently sold to the highest political bidder. These theories also become a radical material force as the evident proof of radicalism and practical energy is manifested in the dogmatic addiction to religious doctrines and an unbridled attempt to foist doctrines on other non adherents, which has resulted into monumental destructions of lives and properties while rubbing the shine off the beauty of nationhood and statehood. An attempt was made to chronicle the dastardly act of religious bigots in Nigeria as a microcosm of the global macrocosm and it was observed that religious organizations represent fertile grounds for training deviants in the art of terrorism.

From the observations made so far, man is the highest essence for man; there should then be a call for a categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is debased, enslaved, abandoned or despised in the name of reverence of a supernatural being.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To curb the excesses of religion as an opium and for it to take the bold front as a tool for nation building and development, the recommendations proffered include,

1. All revolutionary theologian who believes in protecting the daily run of evangelism and its adherents, should be cautioned on the nature of sermon emanating from their pulpits or religious stables; emphasis should be placed on religious tolerance and the why and how to live peacefully in multi-religious society

2. Any religion that gives false hope or fails to improve the moral tone of the country in the direction of development should be considered as a nightmare and as such should be outlawed from operating in the society of humans.

3. In times of conflict situations, religious leaders whose sect are participants in social violence should be arrested and imprisoned. This is necessary in the face of the religious and physical assault on people so as to draw a line of safety where they can return. This would ensure that war incisive and escapist sermons from imam and pastors or other religious leaders do not hold sway and adherents of a particular religion would know that their leaders would be held accountable for any nefarious or dastardly act perpetrated by them.

4. Balance sheets and account books of religious institutions shall be kept and duly audited by external bodies, so as to determine the tax accruable from these religious institutions. The era of business as usual should see its last days.

5. Offerings and tithes shall be tailored along pattern of employment; this should be pegged at a determinable rate so as to forestall pilfering from the mundane world in the name of performing a religious obligation.

6. A wake-up call shall be served on all legs of the tripod: the masses, the society at large and religious institutions on the need to eschew illusions and dwell more on reality which would form the epicenter of development in the society.

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