

Religious aberration in Nigerian contemporary society: A critique

**Author:**Chioma P. Onuorah^{1,2} **Affiliations:**¹Humanities Unit, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria²Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa**Research Project Registration:****Project Leader:** Jaco Beyers **Project Number:** 2440237

Description: The author is participating in the research project, 'Religion, Theology and Education', directed by Prof. Dr Jaco Beyers, Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

Corresponding author:Chioma P. Onuorah,
chioma.onuorah@unn.edu.ng**Dates:**

Received: 28 Jan. 2022

Accepted: 13 Mar. 2022

Published: 29 Apr. 2022

How to cite this article

Onuorah, C.P., 2022, 'Religious aberration in Nigerian contemporary society: A critique', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78(4), a7395. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7395>

Copyright:

© 2022. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Religion has been a part of sociopolitical movements from the dawn of history. With a strong emphasis on morality, religion and religious people were expected to live an exemplary life in society. Thus, religion is a veritable tool for shaping and stirring of the human society. However, religion has placed immense stress on public discourse as the literature on the manipulation of religion by religious leaders for their personal gain and aggrandisement is scanty. This research intends to fill this gap. The theoretical framework of this study is functionalism. It adopts a qualitative research approach. The data was derived mainly from primary and secondary sources. The discussions in this article expose the religious impropriety in Nigerian society, which includes intolerance, hypocrisy, commercialisation of religion, manipulation and exploitation of the adherents, subjecting them to laziness, frustration, desperation and poverty. This alters individual rights and personal development, which are deterrents to progress and oppose the religious tenets of holiness, truthfulness and sacredness. This article advocates good religious values for good behaviour to enhance the social structure and boost societal development.

Contribution: This contemporary time in Nigeria is the era of religious explosion, where there are uncountable new religious faiths and groups. Religious practices in Nigeria are commercialised. Church leaders have abandoned the precepts on which the Church and other religious practices are founded to pursue economic or commercial-oriented interests and tendencies.

Keywords: religion; religious aberration; materialism; hypocrisy; commercialisation of religion.

Introduction

Religion is a universal phenomenon that induces the idea of the supernatural and incorporates certain characteristics, emotions and feelings such as wonder, awe and reverence. Most practices of religion in this contemporary time are seen to be aberrant in the moral standard of its ideal tenet in pursuit of economic interest, materialism and terrorism. Idowu (1973) affirmed that:

Religion results from man's spontaneous reaction to his immediate awareness of a living power, wholly other and infinitely greater than himself; a power mysterious because unseen yet a present and urgent Reality seeking to bring man into communion with himself. (p. 32)

The religious quest of seeking union with God or eternal salvation has been abandoned and focus is on what pleases man.

In Nigeria, religious institutions have been criticised for sustained deviation from the original status of sacredness, truthfulness and holiness (Nwanganga 2017). Africans (Nigerians) are notoriously religious (Mbiti 1990). In Nigeria, no religious sect condones evil, yet crime still persists (Agha, pers. comm., 2021). Thus, the numerical increase in church attendance in Nigeria has no significant impact on the level of virtue and integrity of the society (Emenyionu as cited in Agha 2013:202).

Religion is viewed as a moralistic agent of salvation (Agha 2015:47; Ebewo 2018:20). Being a religious person is worthwhile and as such is expected to live and lead an exemplary life in the society. Religion has impacted the physical, spiritual, moral, social, political and economic lives of people in this contemporary time. Apparently, religion has greatly influenced the affairs of many nations of the world; this implies that there is no nation without a fundamental knowledge of religious ideas and customs. Therefore, religion has played a very significant role and has had a recognisable positive impact on the development of many societies, if not all. That notwithstanding,

religion also plays a very negative role because it is the underlying force behind oppression, discrimination, intolerance, crises and civil wars, among others, if it is abused. This is as a result of religious fanaticism and frivolity.

This study is concentrated on the three major religions in Nigeria (traditional religion, Christianity and Islam) that co-exist with new religious faiths and groups such as Hinduism, Godanism, Chrislam, Grail message, etc. Nigeria is in the era of religious explosion with uncountable new religious faiths and groups (Agha 2013). Most of the founders of these new religious groups are self-proclaimed men of God who dress flamboyantly and preach prosperity to captivate their congregation. They lack every iota of modesty, frugality and simplicity (Ojeifo 2016:16). Jemiriye (1998) observed that:

[M]any of the church leaders seem to have forsaken the teachings on which the Church and other religious practices are founded; but now shamelessly pursue economic or commercial-oriented interests and tendencies. (p. 47)

In today's world, we have heard of the Taliban, Al-Shabab, Al-Qaeda, Hezbolla and Boko Haram, terrorising the world (Ebewo 2018:25).

This study identifies, examines and analyses the various aspects of religious aberration as experienced in Nigeria with their implications on the religious life of the people and the image of the religious groups, reputations of the religious leaders and societal development. It underscores the problems and attitudes that could be changed to balance the issue of religious aberration in contemporary Nigerian society to enhance social structure and boost societal development.

The data for this study were collected using both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources adopted in-depth interview (see Table 1 for interviewees' details). It is a data-gathering instrument that enables a seeker of information to have in-depth knowledge of an issue of concern through face-to-face interaction (at times by

telephone conversation) with the provider of such information (Obasi 1999:165). This was aimed at eliciting direct information on their knowledge of the subject matter. The interview was specifically targeted at people with vast experience of the issue under investigation. The secondary sources included library materials such as textbooks, journal articles, encyclopedias, newspapers, magazines and Internet materials. These materials helped to make a qualitative analysis of the issues involved in the topic. This study, therefore, underpins the critical rage against savagery, moral dearth and aberration that pervert the religious circle in Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this research study is functionalism. This theory was propounded based on the works of Robert Merton (1910–2003), Talcott Parson (1902–1979), Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). This theory emphasises how society functions under certain structures to ensure equality, good governance and unity. According to Macionis (2010:14), the functionalist theory views society as 'a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability'. For functionalism, society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. These interconnected parts include culture, social organisation and social institutions, among others. Religion is one of the social institutions in human society. Functionalism expounds society as a whole based on the work of its constituent elements, namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions. Herbert Spencer also presents these parts of the society as 'organs' that work towards the proper functioning of the body as a whole (Urry 2000).

Based on this theoretical framework, human lives are guided by social structure, which is a relatively stable pattern of social behaviour. Social institution such as religious organisation shapes human behaviour through its religious ceremonies, rituals, etc. Religious rituals bring order, comfort and organisation through shared familiar symbols and patterns of behaviour. Functionalists contend that religion serves several functions to society by providing answers to spiritual mysteries, offering emotional comfort, creating a place for social interaction and providing social control through its norms, mores, etc. In other words, this theoretical framework believes that the structures of society have functions to perform. If these functions are performed appropriately, the society as a whole will be peaceful and the running of the society will also be smooth.

On the other hand, if one part is not functioning well, there will be an adverse effect in the running of the society. As religion performs several positive functions in society, when the leaders of religious groups abuse these functions, it will have a devastating effect on the peace and smooth running of the community. The hostility to religion springs from its deviation rather than religion itself (Gifford Lectures 2022).

TABLE 1: List of interviewees.

S/N	Name of interviewee	Occupation	Age	Date of interview
1	Mazi Ibiam Azu Nnachi	Civil servant	39	01/08/21
2	Hon. Frank Nebo	Technician	60	01/08/21
3	Madam Okuoba Obidigbo	Trader	61	08/08/21
4	Dr. Joshua Uzuegbu	Senior lecturer	49	08/08/21
5	Dr. Christian Agbo	Lecturer	44	08/08/21
6	Mr. Patrick Okonta	Lecturer	40	10/08/21
7	Mr. Martin Arumede	Civil servant	50	10/08/21
8	Mr. Simon Chukwuemeka	Farmer	45	14/08/21
9	Prof. Kenneth Oforkansi	Professor	50	14/08/21
10	Prof. Agha Uka Agha	Professor	73	16/08/21
11	Dr. Nkechi Onah	Senior lecturer	52	16/08/21
12	Mrs. Peace Udensi	Lecturer	35	20/08/21
13	Dr. Joy Obayi	Lecturer	58	20/08/21
14	Dr. Chuka Nwankwo	Farmer	49	28/08/21
15	Mrs. Chinasa Chuks	Civil servant	29	30/08/21
16	Mr. Chukwudozie Ndukife	Retired lecturer	67	03/03/22

Religious aberration negates the core religious practices and changes the root motive of religion to be unethical, materialistic and showcase selfish motives, especially from religious leaders. These could result in exploitation, fanaticism, religious intolerance, terrorism, etc. Religious aberration destroys the harmony and the wholeness of religion. Therefore, religious leaders should embrace the positive functions of religion by practising what they preach, taking the lead in achieving group purposes, strategising new structures for accomplishing religious goals and objectives in order to enjoy the rich prospects of religion and peaceful co-existence.

Clarification of the concept: Religion

Many scholars have rightly pointed out that religion has no utopian definition. This is evident in Armstrong (2014:9) that there is no universal way to define religion. Therefore, religion can be defined based on one's perspective. Omoregbe (1993:4) defined religion as 'interpersonal relationship between a man and a transcendent personal being believed to exist'. According to Metuh (1987:14), 'religion comprises an institutionalised system of symbols, beliefs, values and practices focused on questions of ultimate meaning'. For Marx (1844 [2010]), religion is 'the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions; it is the opium of the people' (p. 175).

Religion serves many purposes in society. According to Agha (pers. comm., 2021), whenever people have one problem or the other, they suffer from frustration, fail to solve the mysteries of nature; then they resort to religion. For Karl Marx, religion is used by the bourgeois as an expression of material realities and economic injustice, in the sense that religion is used by the oppressors to make people feel better about distress they experienced because of being poor and exploited (Wolff & Leopold 2020).

The word aberration is borrowed from the Latin word *aberrant*, *aberrans* – meaning straying from the right or normal way; deviating from the usual or natural type (Merriam Webster 2022). The Oxford Dictionary (2018) defined aberration as 'a departure from what is normal, usual or expected, typically one that is unwelcome. Aberration simply means something that is not going straight' (Hubbard 2003). Religious aberration is the deviation from the original ideal of a particular religious tenet to unacceptable and unwelcome behaviour. It is the way of going wrong in religion and the deviation from the religious ideal (Gifford Lectures 2022).

Expectations from religions in Nigerian society

Nigeria is a country with many religious sects. According to a 2018 estimate on the religious population in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam have the highest population density of 46.9% and 51.5% respectively, and 1.6% for traditional faiths (The World Factbook 2018).

Christianity

Christianity is a religion that is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christianity began in Judea. Christianity is synonymous with Church (Ehrman 2018). Church takes its origin from the Greek word *Ekklesia*; in Hebrew, church is translated as *Kechal Yahweh*; in Jewish background, it is *edha* (Achunike 1996:17). Church is the Christian religious community and an organisation of Christian believers (Stefon 2022). It is the gathering of God's people who are covenanted together to worship God, love one another and bear witness to the world (Ac 14:23; 16:5). Church is first described as the body of Christ (Eph 4:4) in which Christ is the head and Christians form the members.

Violence, oppression and savagery are well observed during Jesus' time on earth. This could be as a result of selfishness and the dominating nature of man among the selected few. Common people protested non-violently against the leaders (the political elites) during the time against the high taxation culture and oppression of their Roman Imperial ruler (Armstrong 2014:122). Some of the religious leaders such as the Scribes and Pharisees were mute because they enjoyed many privileges. This shows a clear picture of class division during that time. Roman armies were used to maltreat the common people in order to create fear and terror in them. This system helped them to crush all forms of opposition. Before his death, Jesus Christ was the mouthpiece of the people under the colonial oppressors of his time. He lived a selfless life of love and justice for all. He preached about the kingdom of God and love of God, love for enemies and love for one's neighbour.

Jesus Christ sees love as the leading virtue and lived an exemplary life during his lifetime. He was highly concerned about love, forgiveness, justice and fairness. From the foundation laid by Jesus Christ, the religious conviction was supposed to show positive values and moral behaviours. Christians should involve themselves in positive values and morals and also seek appropriate ways to incorporate these values. Through this, the ideas and images of Christianity would be well represented. In this epoch, most Christian denominational sects have collapsed the strong tower called religion by using it as an avenue for accumulation of material gain and an instrument of political extortion and oppression for their selfish interests.

Islam

The word Islam has multiple connotations and is derived from an Arabic stem that means peace and submission (Al Farooq Omar Bin Al Khattab 2022). Islam is a religion promulgated by Prophet Mohammed, which began in Mecca. Through the Prophet, Allah revealed several things to his followers. Islam means 'submission to the will of God'. The adherents are called Muslims who worship one, all-knowing God, known as Allah in Arabic (History 2021). They respect some of the same prophets as Jews and Christians, including Abraham, Moses, Noah and Jesus. Muslims contend that

Muhammad was the final prophet to teach Allah's law (History 2021).

Prophet Mohammed, just like other prophets before him, preached the universal message of belief in one God and kindness to humanity, which can be seen in many verses of the Quran. Before the divine revelation to Prophet Mohammed, Mecca was in the grip of social and moral crises (Armstrong 2014:160). Exploitation, oppression and violence were observed in Mecca. Accumulation of wealth and building of private fortune by selfish individuals were present during the lifetime of Prophet Mohammed. There was no equitable distribution of wealth; tribes engaged in warfare and acquisition raids were present during that time for the economic boom of the privileged few. After the divine revelation to Prophet Mohammed by Angel Gabriel, he stood up for the poor and oppressed people by championing the cause of his people. He did so because people were to respect the rights of others and the poor were expected to benefit freely from the wealth of the nation.

The bedrock message of the Quran was a reminder of what constituted a just society that challenged structural violence in Mecca; that it was wrong to build a private fortune but good to share your wealth with the poor and vulnerable who must be treated with equity and respect. The Muslims formed an *Ummah*, a 'community' that provides an alternative to the greed and systematic injustice of Mecca capitalism. Eventually, the religion of Mohammed's followers would be called Islam, because it demanded that individuals surrender their whole being to Allah (Armstrong 2014:162).

Traditional religion

Traditional religion (indigenous religion) is a belief system that has been handed down from one generation to another. It places emphasis on virtues, values and morals. This religion has dominated the thinking of the traditional society and it has shaped their culture, social life, political organisations and economic activities. As Mbiti (1975) postulates:

African religion is the product of the thinking and experiences of our forefathers. They formed religious ideas, they formulated religious ceremonies and rituals, they held proverb and myths which carried religious meaning and they evoke laws and customs which safeguarded the life of the individual and his community. (p. 24)

African religion is represented differently according to the clan and ethnic origin. In this study, Igbo traditional religion is selected to represent the traditional religion. Igbo traditional religion is concerned about the welfare of society.

The coming of Christianity modified some of the atrocities committed in the name of religion under the indigenous religion such as the killing of twins and burying of a dead King with human heads (Nebo and Obidigbo, pers. comm., 2021). That notwithstanding, the traditional

religion provides the guiding principles of Igbo traditional society. These include a sense of respect for human life and human dignity, respect for elders and those in authority; a sense of good human relation, community life, hospitality and generosity; good character as it is associated with the norms of the society, honesty, justice for all, etc. The traditional society solely believes in social justice as it is against any form of oppression and exploitation. It believes in equal treatment irrespective of the circumstance. It upholds the spirit of 'live and let live'. Thus, every individual in the traditional society is expected to be mindful of his actions because any negative action has a consequence (Ndukaife, pers. comm., 2021).

From the given discussion, religion should be a driving force to reform moral laxity and sociocultural abuses. Instead, it is associated with deceit, exploitation and oppression with the religious leaders becoming more hypocritical, selfish and materialistic. This gives room for moral lapses. In essence, some religious leaders and their likes have been known not to do good as they ought to do but indulge in the evil that they ought to despise.

The problem of religious aberrations in Nigeria

There is a prevalence of religious aberrations in Nigerian society, especially in the lives of most religious leaders of different religious sects (Christianity, Islam and traditional religions). The practical teachings of various religious sects in Nigeria overlook the moral precepts of religion, thus leading to loss of morality.

Religious intolerance and denominational rivalry

Traditional religion, Christianity and Islam in Nigeria have been in unhealthy competition and struggle because of rivalries that exist among them. Love and peace are both virtues and religious values in all religious sects, but the practice today is intolerance resulting from a lack of love and refuting peaceful co-existence. The proliferation of churches, mosques and clerics with the numerical strength of their members also creates a kind of struggle for domination and preference (Oforkansi and Onah, pers. comm., 2021). The struggle and the tussle for controlling the evangelical community and competition among different religious sects reduced 'religious profession' to ridicule state, thus encouraging maiming and killing of one another in the name of religion. The criticism that arose from this is that religion is seen as a force for conflict and intolerance. In other words, religion is used by the leaders in masking the truth and misguiding the followers (Marx & Engels 1976). This is as a result of the wrong doctrines and religious teachings of these religions. In an attempt to fulfill the obligations sanctioned by their religious leaders, they see adherents of other religious groups as those that did not know God and therefore should be treated otherwise.

The ungodly attitudes of intolerance often result in fanaticism among the religious zealots. This attitude makes one a religious extremist who desires his religion to retain or regain what he considered as a pure state, knowingly or unwittingly violating the rights of others (Akwanya & Onyeneke 1999). They are backed by political leaders who are also members of their religious group (Arumede and Nnachi, pers. comm., 2021). Religion as an integral part of people's life has a way of affecting people's mind and their ways of thoughts.

The wrong interpretation of religion could lead to intolerance and violence. The controversial term 'radical Islam' has become a well-known label to describe the religion's connection to acts of violence (History 2021). According to Firestone (1999:42), 'there is no universal or systematic Quranic teaching about military violence'. Boko Haram has launched several attacks on the military (Fergus 2019), police (Brock 2015), schools (Haruna 2018), churches (BBC News 2020), mosques (Umar 2015) and other innocent individuals (Idowu & Isenyo 2015). These are as a result of misinterpretation of religion. Recent surveys found that the majority of Muslims have overwhelmingly negative views of terrorist groups such as ISIS (History 2021). Religion nurses the belief that the growth of morality would be improved but instead it encourages the decline in moral values.

Hypocrisy

There is a prevalence of hypocrisy among religious organisations in this contemporary time. According to Okonta (pers. comm., 2021), pastors and imams are involved in human sacrifices, ritual killings and burying people alive in order to acquire more powers and attract more followers. Another example is the murder of a little boy by a Muslim cleric named Kazeem (Oditia 2017). Muslim clerics make amulets with verses of Quran texts written in pieces of paper mixed with herbs and other ingredients for cursing and protection in time of crisis, for women to attract lovers and to bring good luck, for prosperity, etc. This practice is contrary to the Quranic view, which sees Allah alone as the only saviour and sustainer of the universe (Quadri as cited in Adibe 2009).

Some men of God have sexual intercourse with their members and commit other atrocious acts claiming that they acted on the divine directive (Chuks, pers. comm., 2021). Issues of sexual assault, sexual harassment, paedophilia, etc., have been the problem of many religious leaders. According to Ebewo (2018:25), 'Pope Francis of Catholic Church is busy settling disputes and paying compensation to people sexually molested by the clergy'. Religious hypocrisy negatively affects the moral life of the religious leaders and the society at large, thus revealing a clear picture of the deterioration of public morality and ethics.

In traditional religion, believers are in a serious sacred relationship with the creator and other spiritual entities.

These sacred beings have great intensity of the power that attracts human imagination forcefully enough to inspire religious sentiment (Durkheim 1976). Believers aim at their well-being, security and cordial relationship with the spiritual forces. That is why Igbo traditional religion revolves around sacrifice and ritual relevance to spiritual forces. According to Kanu as cited in Adibe (2009:150), 'sacrifice is the summit of the religion and highest activity of worship'. By sacrifice, man acknowledges God's supreme dominion and excellence and offers him adoration, worship him with humility and joy (Arinze 2008:62).

In traditional Igbo religious society, *Eze mmuo* [the chief priest] and *dibia* [native doctor] have the ability to treat illnesses physically and spiritually (Madu 2004). Physically, *dibia* uses plants, herbs, mineral and animal parts to cure the sick. Mystically he uses incantations, exorcism, invocations and ventriloquisms for healing (Adibe 2009:158). Some Igbo traditional priests and native doctors are so fraudulent that they evoke deceptive practices in their religion, which brought imbalances in practice of the traditional religion (Chukwuemeka, pers. comm., 2021). This they achieve through incantations and invocations, making their clients dummies (Awolalu & Dopamu 1979) and spiritually manipulating them at will (Nwankwo, pers. comm., 2021). This also causes havoc on innocent persons and negatively affects the religious and social harmony of Nigerian society.

Materialism and commercialisation of religion

Frustrations resulting from hardship, unemployment, and deprivation of economic and social success can lead to all kinds of stress-motivated deviance in religious practices and some oddities (Adibe 2009; Agha 2013:203; Ebewo 2018:25). Amucheazi (1986:22) observed that 'materialism coupled with status consciousness and value orientation that increased in the modern living have made jobless young men seek means of economic survival through establishment of churches'. Materialism has become an issue in Nigerian Christianity (Alana 2008). Materialism leads to commercialisation of religion that gives rise to the religious explosion that defines the increase of new religious groups with modifications of names (Obiefuna 2004:73). Some Christians overlook the moral precepts of the religion to become increasingly corrupt and materialistic in their practice (Ugwueye 2002:221).

Fraud was introduced in the church through seed-sowing, which could be in the form of money, cars and other material donations (Udansi and Obayi, pers. comm., 2021). The system of seed sowing has turned religion towards materialism. The prosperity gospel preachers feast on the ignorance and gullibility of the people and capitalise on their socioeconomic condition to rob them of their faith and money (Ojeifo 2016:16). These aberrant leaders are not interested in instilling morality into their members.

Quadri as cited in Abioje (2011:60) stated that 'Islam discourages Muslims from taking to begging whilst it extols dignity of labour'. In other words, begging is an offshoot of the poor attitude to work ethics (Gimba 2002:16). Arabic school students (*almajiris*) also create the impression that Islam encourages the culture of begging in practice of religion (Abioje 2011). Many clerics 'render spiritual services to their clients and commercialise some Islamic functions, such as, *aqiqah* [naming ceremony] and *janazah* [funeral service]' (Quadri as cited in Abioje 2011:67).

In traditional religion, fake priests and priestesses are said to be good at prescribing sacrifices that would be of benefit to them and not what the oracle orders (Idowu 1996:10). Paradoxically, most religious leaders take undue advantage of their followers, which is more sterile and less adjusted to the Nigerian spiritual needs.

Manipulation and exploitation of individuals

Some of the religious leaders make the majority of their followers 'victims of circumstance' by deceiving, extorting and exploiting them. These followers join some of these religious congregations in order to get help because of personal problems and out of frustration, because religion gives solace (Uzuegbu and Agbo, pers. comm., 2021). Religion provides important spiritual support, emotional comfort and in the face of failures and disappointment in life, it gives consolation (Onuorah 2018:134). In other words, most people who go to church do so because of their individual problems believing to get solution to their religious leaders. But the reverse seems to be the case as the poor masses are exploited by the religious leaders who blind them to the realities of life. Aberration makes religion to be seen as false hope because some religious leaders take undue advantage of their members.

Most Nigerians join religious groups to find succor because they see religion ministers as having the magical wand for survival through miracles and wonders, foretelling the future and seeing visions. Those who claim to have been blessed make donations of money and other materials to the ministers; more miracles attract more gifts and congregants, hence trade in religion becomes the order of the day (Obiefuna 1997). In Nigeria, the key players in religious business refuse to accept the economic reason as the basis of their action but rather argue that their action is purely spiritually motivated (Essien 2010). Many vulnerable people have entered into this unholy merchandise described as 'Holy Deceit'; the art of trading in God's name (Obiora 1998).

Islamic spiritual leaders take care of peoples' spiritual, magical and medical problems. Their most popular practice is to write some Qur'anic verses with ink on a slab and wash it for their clients to drink. They are widely known for giving magical objects to people with spiritual problems. Some Mallams who pray and make charms for people have been affected by 'materialism which plagues the Nigerian society' (Oseni 1988:247).

In traditional religion, some medicine men resort to sorcery, which is defined as bad or illicit magic (Adibe 2009). Some traditional practitioners are wicked and evil minded; they harm, torment, disfigure and kill their enemies (Chukwuemeka, pers. comm., 2021). Awolalu and Dopamu (1979:246) are of the opinion that one who uses bad magic is a sorcerer and antisocial as the entire art is offensive. All of these deviant behaviours that oppress the people in the traditional society are a result of moral laxity.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that people should not use their divine gift to exploit others in any form, instead they should hold on to love and humility. Those who do not have any spiritual gifts should not claim they have one. Such claims amount to insincerity and deceit to themselves and to the general public. Those who have charismatic calling should not abuse their divine gift of ministration. They should use their gifts in an appropriate way for the services of the church and the general public irrespective of the religious sects or denominations. People who are blessed with the gift of leadership and so on should be effective and use it efficiently for the betterment of every citizen of Nigerian society.

Religious institutions should provide sound doctrine that will accommodate other sects for peaceful coexistence. There is need to organise world religious conference where all the religious leaders should come together to discuss issues on religious problems. As change is inevitable, every religion should change or remove some of the practices that are detrimental to human life and incorporate positive ones in order to maintain group cohesion and companionship. It is very important for religious leaders and the adherents to be truly religious. This will help to reduce the level of religious aberration being practiced in all human endeavours.

Conclusion

This article argues that the level of moral decadence and aberration in the Nigerian society is so alarming that it affects all parts of the societal system including religion. The artifice, moral lapses and religious aberration that pervert the religious circles in this contemporary time is obvious, and the political problems of leadership, exploitation, mediocrity and egoistic tendency among the leaders entrusted with the mandate of the people are luminous. Religion is an integral part of society, religious aberration encourages moral laxity and the abuse of religion is the root cause of religious crises. This leads to bitter religious superiority tussle and intolerance, which weakens the peaceful coexistence of the society. These attitudes need to be changed to balance and strengthen societal peace. Therefore, this article will be a veritable contribution to understanding the problem of religious aberration and also adds to existing literature to serve as a reformatory tool for true religious practice in contemporary Nigerian society.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

C.P.O. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards of research.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

- Abioje, P.O., 2011, 'A critique of commercialization of religion in Nigeria via mass media', *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 1(2), 57–80.
- Achunike, H.C., 1996, *What is church history? An African perspective*, Rex and Charles, Enugu.
- Adibe, G.E., 2009, *Igbo issues: Values, chi, akalaka, magic, agwu and manipulation of divinities*, Mid-Field, Onitsha.
- Agha, U.A., 2013, *The retreat of the holy spirit of African independent churches*, SAPS, Enugu.
- Agha, U.A., 2015, *Religious ethics in a permissive society*, SAPS, Enugu.
- Akwanya, A. & Onyeneke, A. (eds.), 1999, *Francis cardinal Arinze: World needs inter-religious dialogue*, Snaap, Enugu.
- Alana, O.E., 2008, 'Jesus, the Herodians and the Sadducees: A political analysis', *Umah Journal of Philosophy and Religious Studies* 2(2), 38–57.
- Amucheazi, E.C., 1986, *Church and politics in Eastern Nigeria, 1945–1966: A study in pressure group politics*, Macmillan, Ibadan.
- Al Farooq Omar Bin Al Khattab, 2022, *Definition of Islam*, viewed 04 March 2022, from <https://alfarooqcentre.com/en/islam/definition-of-islam/>.
- Arinze, F.A., 2008, *Sacrifice in Igbo traditional religion*, St. Stephens, Onitsha.
- Armstrong, K., 2014, *Fields of blood and history of violence*, The Bodley Head, London.
- Awolalu, J.O. & Dopamu, P.A., 1979, *West African religion*, Onibonjoje, Ibadan.
- British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News, 2020, *Boko Haram kill villagers in Christmas eve*, 25 December, viewed 04 March 2022, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55448105>.
- Brock, J., 2015, 'Special report: Boko Haram – Between rebellion and jihad', *Reuters*, 18 January, viewed 04 March 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-bokoharam-idUSTRE80UOLR20120131>.
- Durkheim, E., 1976, *The elementary forms of religious life*, George Allen & Unwin, London.
- Ebewo, P.J., 2018, 'Soyinka's philosophical treatise on religion: Salvation or savagery?', in E. Nwabueze (ed.), *Wole Soyinka and the poetics of commitment*, pp. 20–35, Timex, Enugu.
- Ehrman, B.D., 2018, 'Inside the conversion tactics of the early Christian church', *History*, viewed 01 March 2022, from <https://www.history.com/news/inside-the-conversion-tactics-of-the-early-christian-church>.
- Essien, A.M., 2010, 'Proliferation of churches: A lee way to commercialization of religion', *European Journal of Scientific Research* 201(4), 1–45.
- Fergus, K., 2019, 'Boko Haram attacks Nigeria Military base in Molai near Maiduguri', *The Defense Post*, 15 August, viewed 04 March 2022, from <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/08/15/nigeria-boko-haram-molai-maiduguri/>.
- Firestone, R., 1999, *Jihad: The origin of holy war in Islam*, Oxford University, Oxford.
- Gimba, A., 2002, 'Mapping out a political agenda for Muslims in Nigeria', *Weekly Trust*, December, pp. 20–26.
- Haruna, A., 2018, 'Buhari speaks of abducted Dapchi schoolgirls', *Premium Times*, 23 February, viewed 04 March 2022, from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/259693-buhari-speaks-abducted-dapchi-schoolgirls.html>.
- History, 2021, *Islam – Five pillars, nation of Islam & definition*, viewed 04 March 2022, from <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/islam>.
- Hubbard, L.R., 2003, *Aberration and the handling of*, Scientology, s.l.
- Idowu, E.B., 1973, *African traditional religion*, SCM, London.
- Idowu, E.B., 1996, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*, Longman, Ibadan.
- Idowu, K. & Isenyo, G., 2015, 'Boko Haram kills 27 in Fresh Monguno Bombing', *Punch*, 23 September, viewed 04 March 2022, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20150927035213/http://www.punchng.com/news/boko-haram-kills-27-in-fresh-monguno-bombing/>.
- Jemiriyi, J.F., 1998, 'Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Economic or Christian emancipation', *African Journal of Biblical Studies* 13(1&2), 47–48.
- Macionis, G., 2010, *Sociology*, 7th Canadian edn., Pearson, Ontario.
- Madu, J.E., 2004, *Honest to African cultural heritage*, Coskan, Onitsha.
- Marx, K., (1844 [2010]), 'Contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of law: Introduction', in J. Cohen, M. Comfort & M. Dobb (eds.), *Marx and Engels collected works*, vol. 3, pp. 175–187, Lawrence and Wishart, London.
- Marx, K. & Engels, F., 1976, *The German ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Mbiti, J.S., 1975, *African religions and philosophy*, Heinemann, London.
- Mbiti, J.S., 1990, *African religions and philosophy African writers series*, Heinemann, London.
- Merriam Webster, 2022, *Aberration*, viewed 27 February 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aberration>.
- Metuh, E.I., 1987, *Comparative studies of African traditional religion*, Imico, Onitsha.
- Nwanganga, P.A., 2017, 'Church commercialization in Nigeria: Implication for public relations practice', *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 28(1), 1–11.
- Obasi, I.N., 1999, *Research methodology in political science*, Academic, Enugu.
- Obiefuna, B.A.C., 1997, *Endure to the end: Charismatics and the hard times*, Pearl, Enugu.
- Obiefuna, B.A.C., 2004, *The youth on fire*, Rex Charles and Patrick, Nimo.
- Obiora, F.K., 1998, *The divine deceit in religion*, Optimal, Enugu.
- Oditia, S., 2017, 'Islamic cleric allegedly stones boy to death for ritual in Lagos', *The Guardian*, viewed 02 March 2022, from <https://guardian.ng/news/islamic-cleric-allegedly-stones-boy-to-death-for-rituals-in-lagos/>.
- Ojeifo, E., 2016, 'The death of Christianity in Nigeria', *Daily Trust*, 28 August, viewed 27 February 2022, from <https://www.pressreader.com/nigeria/daily-trust-sunday/20160828/282587377402556>.
- Omogrebe, J., 1993, *Comparative religion: Christianity and other world religions in dialogue*, Joja Educational Research, Lagos.
- Onuorah, C.P., 2018, 'Religious hypocrisy in Wole Soyinka's play, trial of Brother Jero: The relevance to contemporary Nigerian society', in E. Nwabueze (ed.), *Wole Soyinka and the poetics of commitment*, pp. 129–140, Timex, Enugu.
- Oseni, Z.I., 1988, 'Islamic scholars as spiritual healers in a Nigerian community: An examination of the activities of mallams in Afenmai area of Bendel State', in I.A.B. Balogun (ed.), *The place of religion in the development of Nigeria*, pp. 236–253, Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
- Stefon, M., 2022, *Encyclopedia Britannica (church | definition, history, & types)*, viewed 01 March 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com> > ... > Spirituality.
- The Gifford Lectures, n.d., *The modern predicament: Chapter V – Religious aberration*, viewed 28 February 2022, from <https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/modern-predicament/chapter-v-religious-aberration>.
- The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, 2018, *Aberration*, Oxford University, Oxford.
- The World Factbook, 2018, *Africa: Nigeria*, Central Intelligence Agency, viewed 10 December 2020, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nigeria/>.
- Ugwueye, L.E., 2002, 'Religiosity without religion: A survey of the decay in God's house today', in C.O.T. Ugwu (ed.), *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical perspective*, pp. 221–229, Chuka Educational Publishers, Nsukka.
- Umar, H., 2015, 'Boko Haram guns down 97 people praying in mosques in Nigeria', *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, viewed 04 March 2022, from <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-boko-haram-guns-down-97-people-praying-in-mosques-2015jul02-story.html>.
- Urry, J., 2000, *'Metaphor', sociology beyond societies: Mobilities for the twenty-first century*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Wolff, J. & Leopold, D., 2020, *Karl Marx*, viewed 24 February 2021, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/marx/>.