

## RELIGION, CULTISM AND INORDINATE QUEST FOR WEALTH IN NIGERIA: SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the intricate socio-religious implications of the interplay between religion, cultism, and the inordinate quest for wealth within the Nigerian context. It examines how these interconnected concepts can lead to positive and detrimental outcomes, specifically focusing on exploiting religious ideologies and cultic practices for financial gain. The study utilizes a descriptive analysis, drawing upon diverse scholarly sources, including sociological and theological perspectives, to illustrate the mechanisms through which these phenomena manifest. It highlights instances where religious institutions and cults deviate from their intended spiritual roles to become vehicles for economic manipulation and unethical wealth accumulation. The analysis addresses how religious doctrines are sometimes twisted to justify greed and exploitation, while cults often employ manipulative tactics to drain members of their financial resources, leading to poverty and social isolation. The inordinate pursuit of wealth is scrutinized, particularly its impact on the society, where it contributes to inequality, environmental degradation, and the erosion of social mobility. The significance of this analysis lies in its ability to shed light on the complex dynamics that fuel socio-economic disparities and ethical breaches within religious and cultic frameworks. The paper concludes by recommending reforms in economic systems, a shift in societal attitudes towards wealth, increased education on the dangers of unchecked materialism, strengthening labour unions, and implementing pro-poor governmental policies. It also advocates for the critical evaluation of religious and spiritual groups. Ultimately, the study underscores the necessity of balancing spiritual values with ethical economic practices to foster a more equitable and just society.*

**Keywords: Religion, Cultism, Wealth, Exploitation, Socio-Religious Implications.**

### INTRODUCTION

The intricate relationship between religion, cultism, and the relentless pursuit of wealth presents a complex socio-religious dynamic, particularly within the Nigerian context. While religion traditionally serves as a framework for moral guidance and community cohesion

(Adeyemi, 2018), its susceptibility to manipulation can lead to the emergence of cultic practices and the justification of unethical wealth acquisition. Similarly, the inordinate quest for wealth, when divorced from ethical considerations, often fosters exploitation and social inequality.

Religion, at its core, provides a set of beliefs, practices, and values that offer individuals a sense of purpose and direction (Adeyemi, 2018). However, when religious fervour transforms into fanaticism, it can pave the way for cultism, characterized by unwavering devotion to a leader or ideology, often at the expense of individual autonomy and ethical boundaries. Cults, in turn, can become vehicles for financial exploitation, with leaders leveraging their influence to amass wealth through manipulative tactics.

The inordinate quest for wealth, defined as an insatiable desire for material possessions that overrides ethical and moral standards, further complicates this dynamic. While the pursuit of financial stability is not inherently negative, the unchecked accumulation of wealth can lead to greed, corruption, and the exploitation of vulnerable populations (Akerlof & Shiller, 2009). In Nigeria, the confluence of these forces has resulted in a socio-religious landscape marked by the manipulation of faith for financial gain, the emergence of exploitative cultic groups, and the erosion of ethical values in the pursuit of wealth.

This paper aims to investigate the socio-religious implications of this complex interplay, examining how religious and cultic ideologies are employed to justify and facilitate the pursuit of excessive wealth. It will explore the adverse effects of these phenomena on individuals and society and offer recommendations for mitigating the negative impacts, ultimately fostering a more balanced and ethical approach to religion and wealth acquisition in Nigeria.

## **RELIGION AND ITS IMPACT ON WEALTH CREATION**

Religion, for a long time, has been a topic of debate. Some people think that religion is a force used for something good in the world, while some people are on the side of seeing religion as a force for evil. However, the researcher focused on the area where religion has been used as a tool for good as well as for the acquisition of wealth.

The good impact of religion: Many religious groups opened an entrepreneur that gives the members money. Tithes are used to support the priest and fund charitable programs and services that help the poor and marginalized. Some groups visit motherless babies' homes to donate for their upkeep, and the poor people around them, especially the poor children, are provided for their upkeep in the schools and many other charitable works. This is in line with what Lizardo et al. (2015) wrote: Religious people's participation in charity and volunteering helps to redistribute wealth and reduce inequality in the United States.

Hout. Et al. (2017) welcomed the idea when they wrote that: Religious participation was associated with higher levels of wealth creation but also with a higher level of wealth inequality. This is because religious people are more likely to be entrepreneurs who start businesses that create jobs and contribute to the local economy, which can lead to greater

wealth accumulation. Mazumder (2018) also writes that religious people are more likely to be entrepreneurs and to give to charity because they believe in the importance of hard work and helping others. This suggests that religion can be a powerful force for promoting economic development and social welfare. This entrepreneurship opened by the religious group became a source of wealth creation.

Nevertheless, the same religion can be used for the justification of greed and the exploitation of the poor and the rich. Religious leaders may twist religious teachings to justify their greed and exploitation. For example, they may preach the prosperity gospel, which promises financial blessings to those who donate generously (Moore, 2014). Religious groups may also use the sense of community and belonging they create to exploit followers by pressuring them to give money or volunteer their time, even if they cannot afford to do so (Berger & Berger, 1970).

### **THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN JUSTIFYING GREED AND EXPLOITATION**

Many religious texts teach that God blesses the wealthy and punishes the poor. For example, the Bible states that “the rich shall inherit the earth” (Psalms 24:1), and Ecclesiastes 5:10 states that “he who loves money shall not be satisfied with money.” These verses are often misinterpreted by those who seek to amass wealth at the expense of others. This misinterpretation has hurt society, as it has led to greed, exploitation, and inequality (English Standard Version Bible, 2011). This teaching has given a free hand to the rich, who use this particular passage to justify their exploitation of the poor, seeing themselves as being blessed by the Lord as a reward for their hard work. Many religious leaders have used religion to enrich themselves, draining the poor masses of the little they have. Klein (2007), in her book *The Shock Doctrine*, contends that free-market principles have been employed to legitimize the privatization of public assets and the impoverishment of the underprivileged, frequently under the guise of religious beliefs. This has led to a lack of trust in religion. Even among the religious groups, the poor are marginalized by the wealthy in their way of living, as Graeber (2011) argues that “the concept of debt is central to many religious traditions, and that this has been used to justify the exploitation of the poor by the rich”. Driven by the desire to escape their impoverished circumstances, the poor have resorted to various means to acquire wealth. This behaviour by some religious leaders has led to a lack of trust in religion, as they believe that the rich are better recognized than the poor.

### **CULTISM AND ITS IMPACT ON WEALTH**

As defined by the 2023 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a cult represents a relatively small group of individuals who exhibit devotion to a specific person, idea, or philosophy. This devotion characterizes a group or movement centred around a particular figure or set of beliefs. Cults often feature a charismatic leader perceived as possessing unique knowledge or abilities. Furthermore, these groups may employ mind control techniques to manipulate and exert control over their members.

Cultism, as a social phenomenon, involves a group of individuals sharing a common interest or belief system. These groups can manifest in religious, political, or social contexts. Individuals join cults for various reasons. Some are drawn to the power and influence wielded

by the group's leaders. Others seek a sense of belonging. However, a significant portion of cult members are motivated by the prospect of financial and material gain (Ross, 2014).

The impact of cultism on wealth presents a dual nature. On one hand, some cult members may gain access to wealth through their connections, as certain cult leaders are wealthy and influential. They may also incentivize members to remain within the cult by offering job opportunities and housing. Conversely, other cult members experience financial depletion, leading to poverty and bankruptcy. This often results from tithes or dues paid to the group. As Lalich (2021) notes, "Membership in a cult can impose a significant financial burden on individuals, often requiring them to pay regular dues, tithes, or other fees. Also, cult leaders may pressure members to donate substantial sums of money or even personal property to the organization. This can lead to severe financial hardship for cult members, particularly if they are also coerced into engaging in illegal activities to generate funds for the cult."

These illegal activities can manifest in various criminal offenses, including fraudulent practices. Cult leaders may deceive their followers into donating money or valuable possessions under false pretences. For instance, they might promise that contributions will aid the underprivileged or fund charitable endeavours, while the funds are used for personal enrichment. Theft and misappropriation are also prevalent, where members are coerced into stealing from employers, family, or friends. Additionally, acts of violence may be perpetrated under the group's direction. Drug trafficking and money laundering activities may be engaged in, and child abuse and exploitation are also documented within these groups (Bromley & Melton, 2009).

Moreover, cult members may be isolated from family and friends, depriving them of potential financial support. As Hassan (2020) opines, "Cults can severely hinder their members' financial well-being by isolating them from their supportive social networks, including family and friends. This isolation can deprive members of crucial financial assistance and guidance. Additionally, cults may discourage their members from pursuing legitimate employment opportunities, further exacerbating their financial struggles."

Similarly, members may be required to relinquish all their assets to the group, resulting in financial hardship. The financial implications of cult involvement can be disastrous, as Singer (2019) asserts. "Cult members may be compelled to relinquish their possessions or assets to the cult, and they may also face restrictions on pursuing legitimate employment opportunities. These circumstances can lead to financial hardship, poverty, and even homelessness." However, it is essential to note that not all cult groups face these financial problems; some leverage their connections to acquire wealth.

### **THE IMPACT OF THE INORDINATE QUEST FOR WEALTH ON SOCIETY**

The inordinate quest for wealth significantly contributes to poverty. When individuals prioritize accumulating wealth above all else, they often make decisions that harm others and the environment. One primary mechanism through which this occurs is the exploitation of workers. To achieve sustainable economic growth, a shift is required away from excessive material wealth towards holistic measures of well-being (Collier, 2019). When businesses

focus solely on maximizing profits, they often compromise on wages and working conditions, leading to poverty for workers who cannot sustain themselves on their earnings.

Furthermore, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few individuals exacerbates poverty. When a small group controls a large portion of wealth, they can use their power to influence the economy and society, often to the detriment of the poor. Piketty (2014) highlights this, stating that “the chasm between the affluent and the impoverished is expanding, and this unrestrained pursuit of riches is a significant contributor to this growing disparity.”

The relentless pursuit of wealth also leads to the destruction of natural resources. Klein (2014) contends that this pursuit results in “the exploitation of people and the planet, leading to environmental destruction and various forms of injustice.” This is evident when businesses prioritize rapid resource extraction, disregarding the environmental impact. Such practices lead to deforestation, soil erosion, and other forms of environmental degradation, making it difficult for people to live and work.

Additionally, the inordinate quest for wealth contributes to inequality. Inequality arises when a significant portion of wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, while others struggle to make ends meet. This creates a division between the wealthy and the poor, leading to social unrest and instability. This gap is difficult to close, as the wealthy have greater resources to invest and grow their wealth. Piketty (2014) reiterates, “The gap between the rich and the poor is growing wider, and the inordinate quest for wealth is one of the main drivers of this inequality.”

Moreover, the “erosion of social mobility” occurs when the wealthy have more opportunities for success, making it difficult for those from lower-income backgrounds to advance economically. This can lead to a society where opportunities are determined by birth rather than merit. Collier (2019) argues, “We need to find a way to decouple economic growth from the inordinate quest for wealth.”

Finally, when the wealthy wield significant political power, they can influence government policies to their advantage. This can result in cuts to public services, such as education and healthcare, which disproportionately affect the poor. Klein (2014) emphasizes that “the pursuit of wealth can lead to exploitation, environmental destruction, and other forms of injustice.”

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### **PROFFERING SOLUTIONS TO AN INORDINATE QUEST FOR WEALTH**

Firstly, the reformation of economic systems is crucial. This involves creating a more equitable and sustainable global economy. Measures such as raising the minimum wage, increasing taxes on the wealthy, and investing in renewable energy sources are essential for achieving this goal.

Secondly, a fundamental shift in mindset is necessary. We must move away from a zero-sum view of wealth, where one person's gain implies another's loss, towards a more inclusive and collaborative approach. This approach recognizes that wealth can be generated through cooperation and shared prosperity.

Thirdly, education plays a vital role. People must be educated about the negative consequences of the inordinate quest for wealth. This education should emphasize the importance of social justice, environmental sustainability, and living a meaningful life that transcends material possessions.

Furthermore, strengthening labour unions is essential. Robust unions can ensure that workers receive fair wages and enjoy good working conditions, thereby reducing the gap between the rich and the poor.

Finally, governments must implement pro-poor policies. This includes measures such as raising the minimum wage, providing affordable housing, and investing in infrastructure, all of which contribute to a more equitable society.

## **SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS**

The relationship between religion, cultism, and the inordinate quest for wealth is complex, with various implications. Religion, as an instrument, provides individuals with a sense of purpose and moral values. It fosters generosity, compassion, and understanding, promoting peace within society.

However, religion can also be used for unethical and harmful behavior. This is evident in some religious leaders who exploit their followers financially. They may demand excessive tithes or pressure members into unachievable investments, causing devastating consequences.

Moreover, religious groups have been involved in promoting violence and discrimination. Notable examples include the Crusades, a series of religious wars between Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages (Asbridge, 2010). These wars, lasting from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, were characterized by violence and bloodshed, resulting in millions of deaths.

Another example is the Spanish Inquisition, a period of religious persecution in Spain from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Catholic Church established the Inquisition to suppress heresy, primarily among Jewish and Muslim populations, using brutal methods of interrogation and punishment (Kamen, 2010).

The Rwandan genocide in 1994, a mass killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus, was also fueled by religious hatred (Lemkin, 2000). Hutu extremists used their positions of power to persecute and kill Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

Furthermore, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a terrorist group motivated by a perverted interpretation of Islam, has carried out numerous atrocities, including mass killings,

torture, and sexual slavery (Bergen, 2016). This highlights the serious problem of discrimination based on race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Cultism, often characterized by a charismatic leader and strict hierarchical structure, can also be harmful. Members may be subjected to physical, emotional, and financial abuse.

Cult leaders frequently exploit their members financially, demanding they relinquish their possessions and work for the group without compensation. This form of slavery leads to financial dependence and starvation.

The inordinate quest for wealth also raises moral concerns. While some believe that greed is inherently wrong and that people should prioritize relationships and personal growth, others argue that pursuing wealth is acceptable as long as it does not harm others.

However, the inordinate quest for wealth often leads to greed and exploitation. Driven by desire, individuals may resort to harmful actions to achieve their ambitions, resulting in worker exploitation, environmental degradation, and other injustices.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the relationship between religion, cultism, and the inordinate quest for wealth presents both potential dangers and benefits. It is crucial to be aware of these aspects and make informed choices.

Religion, while sometimes used for violence and discrimination, can also support the poor. Cults, despite their potential for harm, can provide a sense of community. The inordinate quest for wealth, though often associated with greed, can also lead to positive societal contributions.

Therefore, people must critically evaluate religious and spiritual groups that demand money or possessions. Researching groups before joining and leaving uncomfortable situations are essential. Wealthy individuals should support organizations that protect against cult abuse. Finally, educating friends and family about the dangers of cults is crucial.

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