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From the have-more to the have-less: Religious identity and entrepreneurship in religious leadership in Africa

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Abstract

The struggle for sacred authority to secure public legitimacy of competing forms of religious expression among religious groups has been reputed to be market driven (supplying the needs of a community as a market demand) beyond caring for the underprivileged. Scholars aver that faith-based societies seek material resources on earth rather than heavenly reward (prosperity theology versus soul winning). Communities of faith are also presumed to be concerned with saving the world and making people healthy. Consequently, religious leadership uses a shared source and centre of authority in commanding obedience and challenging followers to offer their personal interests towards acquisition of properties and operation of business ventures concurrently with faith broadcasting (religious entrepreneurship). However, religious leadership being reputed as religious entrepreneurship has not specified how the structuring informs the functioning of religious groups for social advancement or regression. So, this paper identifies the ambiguity in the organization of the religious group called the Israelites. This is with a view to tracing out typical features/qualities of certain religious configurations later found in Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. This study employs a socio-literary exploration of the distinguishing beliefs and characteristics of ancient Israelite community as the faith-based society from which Judaism, Christianity and Islam began as world religions. It avers that Christian and Islamic groups address the needs of the underprivileged in flexible ways in Nigeria by being more dynamic and responsive to the needs of their constituencies. Caring for the have-less from the offerings of the have-more is a strategic device in achieving sacred authority and public legitimacy of the distinctive forms of religious expression featured in the competition among faith-based organizations.

Keywords: Africa, Israelite religion, institutionalization of the sacred, religious entrepreneurship, and religious leadership.

Introduction

How religion is perceived in any setting determines what religion can offer to its have-less or manipulated (as spiritual patients, rallied dependant or recuperated followers) and is framed to offer by its have-more or manipulators (as diviners, prophets or miracle workers and healers). The have-less are the underprivileged followers at the mercy of the powerful have-more leaders of religious configuration. Creative juggling of different spiritual and physical

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realities with literary traditions about them by the have-more in rallying the have-less establishes shifts in the perception of religion in every age. This understanding informs the objectives of this article which are identifying the ambiguities in religious perception and tracing out the structuring of religion that determines the function that religion is used to serve as a charitable care.

Ambiguities in Religious Perception

Ellis and Haar avowed an age-old saying that there is no boundary between religion and any other sphere of life in the African sense. They presented religion as the engagement of beliefs in the invisible world that is "distinct but not separate" from the visible world where spiritual beings demonstrate their effective powers over the material world.[2] In this light, religious activities were perceived as undetachable from material needs of socioeconomic sphere and public life.

1. The Swing from Personal Beliefs to Communally Shared Events

J. F. Ade Ajayi averred in his description of propagation and expansion of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria that the religions oscillated between their evangelistic perspective as a set of personal beliefs (with worship rites) and their communal viewpoint as a construction of revered practices in the culture and conscience of their host. Both Islam and Christianity were presented as influencing the creation of theocratic empires where most aspects of life were "regulated by religious laws" for various reasons including the engagement of the socioeconomic nature and technology of British colonial administration for their expansion.[3] Sounaye added that when religion moved from "privacy of belief" into the public affair, religious entrepreneurship reconfigured interactions within social and personal realms to "further illustrate how we can no longer confine religion --- and by extension religiosity --- to the privacy of belief."[4] Balla complemented by saying "since the arrival of the first Western missionaries, Cameroonians have regarded members of the clergy as moral leaders, role models, and advocates for the oppressed."[5]

However, while there are arguments in favour of religion as an instrument of emancipation and advancement in some quarters, some scholars have records of woes about religion as an instrument of restraints and regression. O'Connor and Falola explained how the exchange of divinatory services and resolution of problems for cash and kind that were regarded as offerings in *Orisa* worship served religious entrepreneurship. They asserted that

[2] Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, "Religion and Politics in Africa", in Elias Kifon Bongmba (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, (Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 457.
[3] J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, (London: Longmans, 1965), xiii-23.
[4] Abdoulaye Sounaye, "Alarama is all at once: preacher, media 'savvy', and religious entrepreneur in Niamey", *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, (2013), 89.
[5] Séraphin Balla, "Pentecostal Pastors in Cameroon as Social Success Stories: An Anthropological Perspective", *Africa Today*, Vol. 67, No. 2-3, (Winter 2020 / Spring 2021), 55, 41-61.

> *Orisa* worship in Nigeria is frankly structured as a client religion in which services are purchased…the commercial aspect is not clear-cut but that 'payments' are thought of in the religion as 'offerings'… A payment made to a healer or diviner is considered an offering to assist with the satisfactory resolution of a problem or to attract the best outcome of a life decision through a propitiatory offering of cash.[6]

Schultze reported how *Christianity Today*, an American evangelical periodical founded by Billy Graham with free distribution of copies to pastors in 1956 achieved moneymaking triumph under the business management of Harold Myra who had "a mandate from the journal's board to make the magazine profitable…filled with advertising and aggressively soliciting new subscribers."[7] Ogungbile captured the yearning for material prosperity and wealth recurring among religious groups in Nigeria with their textual proof of Genesis 13:2 as asserting that "Abraham, the father of faith and model of Christians, was extremely rich…that Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold" in their preaching.[8] Balla proffered that though, Pentecostal prosperity gospel attracted "debates, disputes, and discussions involving material factors" yet, it had been used by preachers to seduce the population to rally a following, to achieve upward mobility in the society, and to "accumulate wealth, and pursue charitable activities."[9] Tsehayu and Østebø recorded that offerings and tithes that used to be regarded as religious acts in the past had become increasingly thought of as investments which worshippers entrusted to religious leaders in the present age in exchange for repayment in the future for wealth and health. They documented how religious entrepreneurship from Murid Shifa provided divine security and prosperity to female migrants moving from Ethiopia to the Gulf in exchange for financial gifts.[10]

2. Religion as a Social Construction of sacredness

Kessler avowed that religion should be regarded as an instrument or "a force that influences, for good or for ill, the lives of practically everyone who is alive" since "in America, religious ideas were used both to promote the destruction of indigenous peoples and to end it, to promote slavery and to stop it."[11] Accordingly, Seabright averred that

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[6] Kathleen O'Connor and Toyin Falola, "Religious Entrepreneurship and the Informal Economic Sector. "Orisa" Worship as 'Service Provider' in Nigeria and the United States", *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde*, Bd. 45, (1999), 117, 115-135.
[7] Quentin J. Schultze, *Christianity and the Mass Media in America*, (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2003), 125-126.
[8] David Ogungbile, "African Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel" in Clifton R. Clarke, (ed.), *Pentecostal Theology in Africa*, (Oregon: PICKWICK Publications, 2014), 135.
[9] Séraphin Balla, "Pentecostal Pastors in Cameroon as Social Success Stories: An Anthropological Perspective", *Africa Today*, Vol. 67, No. 2-3, (Winter 2020 / Spring 2021), 43.
[10] Yekatit Getachew Tsehayu and Terje Østebø, "Religious Entrepreneurship and Female Migration: The Case of a Muslim Religious Leader in Masqan, Ethiopia", *Africa Today*, Vol. 67, No. 2-3, (Winter 2020 / Spring 2021), 63-83.
[11] Gary E. Kessler, *Studying Religion*, 3rd Edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 10.

> denunciations of the commercial spirit, and more generally of the excesses associated with economic development, can be heard from within virtually all religious traditions. Conversely, there have been prosperous adherents of all the major religions who have argued fervently that their religion was an essential ingredient in their economic success.[12]

Consequently, religion is considered in this discourse as a social construction of special respect (a holy/a sacred sense) on elements of social interactions that an acknowledgment of spirituality engaged to manifest its impactful presence. The social elements like a facilitation of transformational messages; a projection of innovative problem-solving resources to rally a following; an organization of people into groups that existing social institutions had neglected; and an institutionalization of covenant for family/household socialization and neighbourliness (treaty in international relations or contractual agreement in business relations) get engaged as spaces where the spiritual realm and the physical world intertwine. The social configuration is usually found to engage the holy/sacred sense in introducing ethical ideals into socioeconomic relationships and institutions (where morality is demanded from everyone) as justice is emphasized for the development of individual potentiality for spirituality. Religion as the conferment of holiness/sacredness on any element of social interaction in this sense has necessarily witnessed the patterning (leadership) of the sacred. So, structuring or patterning of a religious significance needs to be uncovered in order to establish the target of its *modus operandi* as the whole form of the relationship in the religious group rather than focusing on any of the particular items in its composition. This study affirms that the socioeconomic ranking of any society (viewed as the market for competitive and commercial explorations) that a religious group belongs to and targets to gain, in turn affects the approach that the group adopts in achieving legitimacy in a flexible way.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs the socio-literary approach to interpreting the Old Testament from Norman K. Gottwald, in addressing both charitable care and exploitative relationship from the have-more to the have-less in Israelite religion as the background of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The socio-literary approach examines the Bible as a literature that can be interrogated to address social challenges. It concentrates on rhetorical and structural analyses towards an understanding of the biblical social organization and social history.[13]

The biblical construction of Israelite social history in this approach alludes to the importance of Israelite location as a setting exposed to preservation and exploration which culminated famine in the highlands of Israel and invasions from other nations. Gottwald records the identity of the inhabitants of the promised land as the

[12] Paul Seabright, "Religion and Entrepreneurship: a match made in heaven?", *Archives de sciences sociales des religion*, 61e Année, No. 175, (2016), 201.
[13] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), xxvii.

> "Canaanite(s)" originally referred to a hierarchic and tributary socioeconomic and political system peopled by kings, administrators, armies, monopoly merchants, exploitative landlords and overseers, priests, and deities. Israel had countered and overcome this system by winning over many Canaanites to its own ideas, armed struggle, and social organization.[14]

In this sense, Israel was a religious organization of the LORD on "the trunk road from Egypt to Mesopotamia, bringing merchants, diplomats, and invading armies…the heart of Israel as a mixed blessing of fertile land, facilitated communication, and vulnerability to attack."[15] The King's Highway in Israel running between Damascus and Midian was "heavily trafficked by merchant caravans that were obliged to pay tolls" and it was imperative for Israelite leaders who aimed at dominion over Transjordan to gain control of the lucrative commerce along the King's Highway to win legitimacy.[16] References to the ancestors' forms of wealth range from flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, wealth in metal, to cultivated lands and suggest either sedentary farming with animal husbandry or commercial enterprise. Thus, the patriarchs were regarded by some scholars as merchants moving their goods by donkey caravans, while other interpreters suggested that they were independent transport contractors working for interstate merchants. The record about Abraham as a commander of 318 armed men (Genesis 14:13-16) was used to hint at a military adventurer serving as a mercenary band leader for the established city-states of the age.[17] In this way, the complex traditions about several ancestors of Israel derived from different member groups within ancient Israel was employed in portraying

> several different socioeconomic strategies employed by the Canaanite highland populace to cope with their survival needs prior to the large-scale emergence of united Israel: strategies of farming and animal husbandry, strategies of transhumant pastoralism, strategies of mercenary soldiery, and strategies of commercial enterprise, either as merchants or as haulers of goods.[18]

The social organization of the Israelites that was constructed (by the socio-literary perspective) from several individual units that had been edited and grouped also introduced the role of its deity and framed traditions around "prominent ancestors" using different literary types or genres. Treaty (covenant) forms between God and Abraham and between Israelite ancestors and their neighbours or kin pointed at evidences of being extracted from

[14] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 275.
[15] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 45.
[16] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 49.
[17] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 172-173.
[18] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 177.

diverse ancestral traditions. Pronouncement of blessings or promises of blessings from God on the dynamic ancestors hereby served as a catalyst for a biological line of descent bearing divine blessing against those who branched off and were treated as lost to the ongoing story. Records of itineraries linked to divine promises and blessings as directives set various locations for God's revelation to the ancestors and portrayed occasions for sacrifice from the ancestors to God. Motifs of divine blessing and promise targeted land acquisition and recognition of descendants of the ancestors who could be individual family heads or symbolic heads of entire tribes with veiled tribal histories of the religious identity called the Israelites. Birth narratives were also framed to portray the origins of the tribes while marital accounts were read as the alliance of two tribes.[19] The socio-literary analyses traced that ancient Israelite traditions did not separate migratory propagation of faith from migratory acquisition of material resources in the relationships between the "prominent ancestors" of Israel and other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) identities.

Therefore, this study asks the following questions in tracing out the structuring of religion: what are the characteristics of religious groups that religious leadership juggle together for legitimacy? How does religious leadership command obedience and influence execution of group's norms as roles in its propagation of its brand of religion as religious entrepreneurship? How does the structure of Israelite religion influence the functioning of Christianity and Islam that cite Hebrew biblical personalities in their holy books for their configuration, administration and regulation in Nigeria?

Characteristics of Religious Groups

Features (attributes) of religious groups revolve around two forms of religious organization. Blenkinsopp's description of religious institutions viewed it as "apparatus of control" accumulating wealth in sustaining public legitimacy.[20] Kessler's construction of religious institutionalization revolved around having "a sense of common purpose" or creating "a sense of identity and a sense of belonging to something larger" than the group or any of its members in creating order and stability.[21] Blenkinsopp's portrayal averred that "temples in antiquity were not just places of sacrifice and prayer but institutions, often very wealthy, with their own capital and work force." Estate managers and overseers were necessities as "the wealthier temples also owned arable and grazing land" for socioeconomic purposes. The connection between religion and economic relationship stood upon the recognition given to religion since the temple was regarded "as a political and economic as well as religious centre".[22] Kessler's senses of a common purpose in a religious group culminated in creating the need for the group (i) to continue to exist and (ii) to bourgeon for public acceptability amidst other existing communities of faith. These two necessities

[19] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 150-163.
[20] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1995), 152.
[21] Gary E. Kessler, *Studying Religion*, 3rd Edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 240-241.
[22] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1995), 152 & 167.

for creating order and stability in religious groups were also detailed to require "organization of the sacred" or "institutionalization of the sacred" by a) recruitment of entrants; b) socialization of new members; c) production of social norms as roles (economic and emotional standards) to execute; d) maintenance of the typical features by hierarchical arrangement of ranks and statuses; and e) defence of commitment to exclusively revered goals ("a sense of common purpose") with their politics.[23] So, religious groups with their tradition from antiquity for being apparatuses of control and institutions for political, economic and religious functions maintained a valid and rightful public legitimacy through the "institutionalization of the sacred" as religious leadership intertwined with religious entrepreneurship in times past.

Religious Leadership

Cole and Kelly averred that "there is no one best way of leading"[24] because leadership has always been regarded as a changing and progressive process of uncovering the right equilibrium between the needs of a group and the tasks/goals of the group in a given situation. Leading in this light thus involves facilitating shared objectives of the group; influencing mutual endeavours for realizing the tasks of the group; and acclimatizing collective efforts on process of meeting the changing and competing situations. Consequently, Kessler avowed that religious leadership as a sacred authority usually gets created as the group recognizes a collective basis of authority to command obedience and challenge people to sacrifice their personal interests in order to carry out a belief or an instruction. Leading followers under this basis involves making them to execute the norms or roles (the revered purpose) of the religious group though such a step is often confronted with the need to confirm genuineness of people's professed concern for the main mission of the group as it: (1) grows in size; (2) forms a bureaucracy (policy with procedure) that freezes its flexibility to stir legalism; (3) uses manipulative procedures, even coercion, to increase and retain members; (4) moves members into positions of power and honour that carry rewards; (5) addresses members developing and rejuvenating the distinctive beliefs and practices of the group into a factional interest/pressure group through charismatic, traditional, and legal-rational kinds of authority; and (6) constructs holy scriptures as additional bases of authority (which in turn influence the religious group that created them) and for establishing a worldview of interpreting successive events to fit their changing circumstances.[25]

Entrepreneurship in Social Relationship

Entrepreneurship may be defined from both the nonconformist or radical ideology and the conformist or conventional principles. The conservative ideology of entrepreneurship (as the production of an enterprise by teamwork) is contrasted today by the more popular maverick interpretation of entrepreneurship (as the creation of a new entity by the singular creativity of a

[23] Gary E. Kessler, *Studying Religion*, 3rd Edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 240-257.
[24] Gerald A. Cole and Phil Kelly "Leadership Theory and Practice" in *Management Theory and Practice*, (United Kingdom: Cengage Learning, 2011), 69-70.
[25] Gary E. Kessler, *Studying Religion*, 3rd Edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 257-264.

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great genius). However, the structure and the existing institutions in any setting are factors determining the successful mobilization of entrepreneurship in such contexts.

Schneewind described entrepreneurship as starting an enterprise that makes (produces) and sells (exchanges) commodities (things bought and sold) with the mission of saving the world or making people healthy and happy using switchable ways. In this vein, the entrepreneur's identity would spring more from his/her faith, ethnicity, place of origin, family roles and so on than occupation/profession. Consequently, "for the entrepreneur, the object of technique is the market, rather than a particular commodity."[26]

Sigilo addressed entrepreneurship from collaborative method as setting up a business in the entrepreneurial space by "adopting a participatory approach" as "local development associations act as facilitators" to help entrepreneurs "manage projects over the life cycle."[27] Balkeneude and Buijs complemented Sigilo by adding that an entrepreneur "organizes cooperation between people and creates an environment of and for co-creativity." This view allows additional spaces for more inclusive support and participation in the generation of any idea behind the creation of a new entity as a successful enterprise.[28]

Religious Entrepreneurship

Erin Kuhns averred religious entrepreneurs did not detach acquisition of properties from dissemination and broadcasting of faith. Rather, they "propagate" their brands of religion and "market products" of their denominational demographics in the bid "to meet demand as the considerable market-force" of their changing situations. Christian centred culture of entrepreneurship increased in strength because religious "denominations themselves have been and continue to be a type of entrepreneurial force" as early movement of brands of religion indulge "their funds or membership." So, a religious leader as an entrepreneur at the early movement used his/her "business successes as a land agent to buy real estate…for his group's headquarters. Through his finances, the group also ran an orphanage and a retirement home." In this way, religious entrepreneurship involved "operating multiple business ventures simultaneously." So, the ability "to manage business projects" while "participating in the formation and propagation of a 'Christian popular culture'" was represented with creation of "massive ministry empires". Yet, "the socioeconomic standing of the society in which they are a part" were found to be used in influencing the activities of members for entrepreneurial ventures. In addition, "the interpretations given to entrepreneurial activity" were known to reflect how people used "narratives to interact with, to adapt to, or to change socioeconomic realities."[29]

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[26] Sarah Schneewind, *The Social Drama of Daily Work*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024), 35.
[27] Esther Sigilo, *Rethinking Civil Society in Transition*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 130.
[28] Jan Peter Balkeneude and Govert Buijs, *Capitalism Reconnected*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024), 125-126.
[29] Erin Kuhns, "Religious Entrepreneur" in Stanley M. Burgess (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 168-170.

Organizational transitions from product-based (consumer focus) level to platform-based (complementor focus) level as well as shifts in organizational identity from state A to state B and state A to state A+B (or A+B+C as so on) were characteristic of entrepreneurship. But, religious doctrines (beliefs) and values attached to the organizational identity were found to also influence how organizations moved from product-based model to platform-based model.[30] Religious backgrounds of entrepreneurs were also known to influence how and who they networked with and to select which alliance type to make in the struggle for power to attain legitimacy. Religious groups that belonged to societies that were of the same faith (religious practices) were less likely to engage in joint ventures for public acceptability.[31] Consequently, there emerged also a theological thinking that considered the intertwine between religious concepts and business or economic relationship where the business was purposed to function as "a form of religion promising a secular salvation". So, scholars assumed in such a context that "there is no invisible hand" saving "the individual from taking any responsibility" about transactional delivery of services as all "these contributions end up in questions about ethical behaviour."[32]

However, in his interrogation of competition for religious entrepreneurship and leadership, Pelletier asserted that religious entrepreneurs "compete for sacred authority" in a struggle for "the right to speak in the name of Islam" by standing on "the position and strength of other players in the religious environment and on their response to Islamists." This characteristic as "the structure of the religious market------either competitive or monopolistic--------shapes the behaviour of religious leaders and firms." Consequently, religious leaders and "religious firms" in entrepreneurship struggled for religious authority to define the legitimacy of their competing forms of religious expression by being more dynamic and responsive to the needs of their constituencies through (a) locating environments that were open to competition because they had weak clerics, fragmented networks, tinier "security of tenure", limited assets, and small/insignificant following; (b) creating value to compete for and to attract followers as customers; (c) mobilizing and encouraging entrants with incentives; and (d) using the competitive atmosphere to mobilize resources including "violence-enabling" devices to legitimize their authority.[33] Eventually, Fiet traced and presented a series of religious doctrines that greatly influenced entrepreneurship.[34]

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[30] Christiana E. Shalley, Michael A. Hitt, and Jing Zhou, *The Oxford Handbook of Creativity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 391.
[31] Gorkan Ahmetoglu, Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, Bailey Klinger, and Tessa Karcisky, *The Willey Handbook of Entrepreneurship*, (United Kingdom: John Willey, 2017), 463-464.
[32] Romeo V. Turcan and Norman M. Fraser, *The Palgrave Handbook of Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Entrepreneurship,* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 479-481.
[33] Alexander Pelletier, "Competition for Religious Authority and Islamist Mobilization in Indonesia", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 53, no. 3, (2021), 527-528. 525-547.
[34] James O. Fiet, *Religious Doctrines and their Influence on Entrepreneurship*, (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

Social Structuring for Group Functioning in Ancient Near East

This section traces out the basis of religious entrepreneurship in the structuring of Abrahamic traditions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam from Israelite religion. How the structuring of Israelite religion determined its functioning in ancient Israel is traceable from the texts of the Old Testament that is regarded as the word of God to the Israelites, the Jews and Christians. Levin viewed the Old Testament in its present and final form as a collection of materials overlaid with an inner-textual interpretation and commentary that increasingly expanded certain and already existing traditions as a product of Persian and Hellenistic periods. Its "guiding concern was to relate the transmitted text, which was understood as the word of God, to the changing conditions in the ongoing history of Judaism."[35] More so, Brown added that "the biblical text is the product of a particular community whose turbulent history involved the painful struggle for theological discernment, not to mention survival."[36] Consequently, Israelite religion as laid out (structured) in the texts of the Old Testament functioned positively or negatively according to how it was perceived and employed. The structure that is deducible from the socio-literary interpretation of the Old Testament in this discourse is about how the have-more as "prominent ancestors" who were wealthy merchants of diversely convergent resources (material and human) assembled spiritual qualities to manifest on various sites with covenant and by consecration in staging needed transformation by differentiation for legitimacy. This process is coded in this piece as the relationship of convergence with consecration into differentiation in the bonding of propagation of faith with acquisition of material resources. This is in agreement with Barton that "all interpretations are valid interpretations" since an interpretation should be preferred "because it is desirable in itself as promoting some value taken to be worthwhile" and most especially "on the grounds that one ought not to use the Bible as a tool of oppression".[37]

In the light of the above, the "prominent ancestors" of Israel did not detach acquisition of material resources from propagation of faith in their settlement in the promised land gotten from *YHWH*. The term employed in this feat is כָּל־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ *kol-rekûšäm ´ášer räkäºšû*. The words *rekûšäm* and *räkäºšû* are from *rks* (רכשׁ). Brown, Driver and Briggs averred its meaning as a collection or a gathering of goods, possessions, including utensils or booty.[38] Strong, Kohlenberger III, Swanson and Goodrick cross referenced in the lexicon its meaning as the acquired substance and properties, the gathered, accumulated or gotten equipment, or the tied or bound furnishings (Genesis 12:5; 13:6; 15:14; 46:6; 1 Chronicles 27:31; 28:1; 2 Chronicles 32:29) with trading of

[35] Christoph Levin, "Source Criticism: The Miracle at the Sea" in Joel M. Lemon and Kent Harold Richards (eds.), *Method Matters*, (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2009), 41.
[36] William P. Brown, "Theological Interpretation: A Proposal" in Joel M. Lemon and Kent Harold Richards (eds.), *Method Matters*, (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2009), 390.
[37] John Barton, "Reflections on Literary Criticism" in Joel M. Lemon and Kent Harold Richards (eds.), *Method Matters*, (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2009), 535.
[38] S. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 940.

merchandise (*rekella*) and riches from possessions (*rekush*) 11 times in the Old Testament.[39] In other words, the acquisition of material resources was engaged in the movement of "prominent ancestors" into the promised land as well as in their worship of *YHWH*. In this way, the material acquisitions served the spiritual purpose of propagation of faith.

1. Convergence of traditions of ancestors with other ANE traditions

The "prominent ancestors" led human resources who were converged from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. They included Abram later called Abraham with *wü´et-hanneºpeš ´ášer-`äsû beHärän* the people he 'squeezed' as acquisition in Haran (וְאֶת־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בְחָרָן) for his missionary migration to Canaan (Genesis 12:5). The number amounted afterwards to 318 trained fighters (Genesis 14:14). His newly found faith led him to run the sectarian movement of 318 trained fighters in recovering Lot his nephew who had been kidnapped in Genesis 14:13-16. Abraham got Rebekah as a wife for Isaac his son from the Aramean/Syrian background of worship of other gods (Genesis 24:1-67: 25:20; 28:5; 31:19-24; Deuteronomy 26:5-9; Joshua 24:1-2). Jacob moved out of Laban, his father-in-law's family of worship of other gods with Rachel holding her father's household gods הַתְּרָפִים אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ (*hatteräpîm ´ášer le´äbîºhä*) in her custody (Genesis 31:4-21). Jacob had 66 household leaders under his charge in his migration to Egypt (Genesis 46:26) as Esau was excluded because of the commitment he had for Canaanite traditions, though he had 400 followers (Genesis 33:1). Another "prominent" leader was Moses who was in charge of 600,000 men with a mixed multitude of other people and the Midianites in the escape and migration of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan (Exodus 12:37-42; Numbers 11:21).

Joshua succeeded Moses and led the alliance among Canaanite Rahab's family from Jericho, the Gibeonites and the Israelites with an oath (Joshua 6:22-25; 9:1-27). David was also a "prominent" leader who initially had 400 followers before they grew to 600 personalities while roaming the border between the Israelites and the Philistines (1 Samuel 22:2; 30:9). David consulted the LORD for revelation and guidance using the Ephod and he was accordingly instructed (1 Samuel 23:9-13; 30:6-9), unlike Saul who enquired direction from the LORD but was not guided by dreams, Urim or prophecy (1 Samuel 28:6). Assembling people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds employed integrated policies (inclusive approaches) with the LORD as the great king to be feared above all gods (Psalm 95:3; 96:4; 97:7&9). Yet, in forging an egalitarian societal configuration in ancient Israel, Yahweh owned the land and his people were equally relating with him and among one another[40] in Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) socioeconomic and religious system of syncretistic impulse for

[39] James Strong, John R. Kohlenberger III and James A. Swanson, "*rekush*" in Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary-Index to the Old Testament, *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 2001), 1455. See also Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlenberger III, "r*akash*" in Hebrew to English Dictionary and Index to the NIV Old Testament, *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 1999), 1490.

[40] A. J. Todd, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Circle" in Robert B. Coote (ed.), *Elijah and Elisha in Socio-literary Perspective*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar Press, 1992), 10.

polytheism amidst its merger of gods with similar traits and functions.[41] Incorporation of socioeconomic and cultic traits of numerous deities into the cult of a state deity and a national god in a national religion was the tradition between Egypt (in Africa) and Mesopotamia in ANE literature.[42]

2. Consecration by divine experience, offering and covenant

Several migrations of the "prominent" leaders to different locations have God's revelation to the leaders attached to them and portray occasions for cultic activities, offerings and sacrifices from them to God in the Old Testament. The ability to commune with God and receive divine direction snowballed into an efficient delivery of services and successful adventures among the "prominent" leaders. The LORD made covenants (בְּרִית *berît*) with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the Israelites under Moses at Sinai, and with Davidic dynasty for the promised land (Genesis 15:18; Exodus 19:5-40:18-21; 2 Samuel 7:11-29). Abram communed with the LORD and received guidance concerning his migration from Haran to Canaan (Genesis 12:1-9). The LORD made a treaty (covenant) with Abram regarding the land between River of Egypt and River Euphrates in sacred activities (Genesis 15:12-21). Abram used tithing as he was found offering the tithe in a sacred role to Melchizedek, a priest of *´ël `elyôn* God Most High and king of Salem (Genesis 14:13-24). *YHWH* as *´ël šaddäy* (God Almighty) revealed himself in an everlasting covenant with a change of his name from Abram to Abraham in Genesis 12:1; 13:4; 17:1; 28:3; 35:10-11. Isaac was divinely instructed to continue to reside in Canaan amidst famine in order to achieve the possession of Canaan as the promised land (Genesis 26:1-14). Jacob also received a divine encounter from the LORD and vowed to pay tithes of all the proceeds that the LORD would grant him (Genesis 28:10-22). Jacob later had a vision to migrate to Egypt with a divine promise that he would be buried by Joseph at an old age (Genesis 46:1-6). Though, Abram was divinely directed to go to Canaan, he did not separate acquisition of properties כָּל־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ *kol-rekûšäm ´ášer räkäºšû* from his migration in propagating the faith (Genesis 12:5). Though, Jacob got a divine instruction to go to Egypt, he also did not separate the acquisition of properties רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ *rekûšäm ´ášer rä/kšû* from living out his faith (Genesis 46:6).

Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) setting engaged issues of social and economic interests in revering things to be considered holy/sacred. It demonstrated its belief in the intertwining of the invisible realms with the physical world. Gods, spirit-beings, influential rulers and sacred functionaries manifested their impacts in ANE by interfering in its daily human socialisation and business transactions. The ANE people employed the socioeconomic issues of their age in the worship and invocation of the invisible realms. According to Averback, production and utilization of material wealth generated within ANE featured tithes or ten percent of the wealth as taxes levied by local kings/rulers. Tithes then served as a share in business transactions as it was also exacted as the standard 10% tax on crops and livestock. However, regular Akkadian records

[41] T. J. Lewis, "The Deity and Function of El/Baal berith", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 115, no. 3, (1996), 423.
[42] M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd Edition, (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 39, 66-67, 122, 293.

also referred "to tithes to the gods and their temples" as evidences of intertwining of secular taxes with religious rites in taking care of religious functionaries. In this way, "tithe was a consignment taken as a unit from the local region into the central stores of *Arad*, from which it was then distributed to the specialists, to whom the tithe provisions were due".[43] So, operating business ventures simultaneously with propagation of faith in public affairs was religious entrepreneurship in ANE where ancient Israel flourished.

3. Differentiation for transformation

The trajectory of transformation of ancient Israelite traditions of worship from plural religious identities to monotheistic recognition emphasizes the creed: the LORD our God is one LORD יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה ׀ אֶחָד *yhwh (ʿädönäy) ʿélöhêºnû yhwh (ʿädönäy) ʿehäd* (Deuteronomy 6:4). Syncretistic backgrounds or foundations got absorbed and transformed with innovative manipulations to fashion a new delineation by assimilation. The family of Terah including Abram and Nahor as rich Arameans/Syrians in ANE in Genesis 12:4-6; 13:1-7; 14:12-14; 25:20; 28:5; 31:20&24 engaged in social and economic relationships with other ANE merchants (business transactions of buying properties and acquiring people) in Genesis 12:11-20; 14:13&16,21-24. Terah's family participated in worshipping other gods (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים *ʿélöhîm ʿáhërîm*) known in Joshua 24:2 cp. Genesis 11:27-32; 12:4-5. Abram became a worshipper of *YHWH* and raised a group of at least 318 followers under him as the worship of *YHWH* became known as the way of the LORD (דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה *deºrek yhwh (ʿädönäy)*) and moved from the level of personal beliefs in Aramean/Syrian system into an Israelite communal rite with its divine instruction or law known as תּוֹרָה (Genesis 18:19; 26:5).

Monotheistic differentiation using the *torah* became the point of distinctive entrepreneurial ventures combining commercial enterprise with mystical qualities for divine revelation in Abrahamic relationship with the natives of Canaan and Mesopotamia (Genesis 12:14-20; 13:1-4,14-18; 17:1-13; 18:17-33; 20:1-18). Righteousness and justice צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט *sedäqâ wûmišpät* which the LORD recognized in Abraham in Genesis 18:19 became the point of equity and legality: righteous statutes and judgment of all the instruction/law הַזֹּאת חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים צַדִּיקִם כְּכֹל הַתּוֹרָה *huqqîm ûmišpätîm saddîqìm keköl hattôrâh hazzöʿt* under Moses in Deuteronomy 4:8. The social configuration to live by was the law of the egalitarian societal configuration that emphasized charitable care. Other gods that were under the LORD and were to bow to the LORD were downgraded to idols shaped by humans and given reverence (Psalm 96:5; 97:7; Isaiah 44:10-17). Dozeman, Romer, and Schmid added that in a twist of events in ancient Israel and ANE, the culture of exclusivity exerted polemics against any protestant cult that assumed avant-garde using innovative and unconventional approaches. Cultic functionaries judged kings (as political and religious leaders) as 'good' or 'evil' in relation to the will of the national deities

[43] Richard E. Averback, "Tithe, Tenth", Willem A. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, volume 2, (Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 1035-1036.

that they celebrated.[44] Differentiation in ANE thereby condemned the inventive kings as "favouring another city's sanctuary" whenever they supported the system of any other god above the national deity since every national deity had its own "theology of the main city".[45]

Charitable Care in Religious Leadership and Entrepreneurship as A Right

The configuration and regulation of the worship of *YHWH* from the background of *ʿélöhîm ʿáhërîm* (other gods) as *ʿël ʿelyôn* (God Most High) was adapted as *ʿël šaddäy* (God Almighty) under Moses (Exodus 6:3). The structuring of Israelite group for orderliness established a political economy of the acquired material wealth of the promised land in its intertwining of the relevance of material acquisition to the worship of *YHWH* (Deuteronomy 8:6-14; 23:19-20; 26:1-4,10-15). A covenant spelling out terms and conditions of interpersonal relationship was constructed for the socialization of the Syrians/Arameans and other absorbed tribal/ethnic entrants into Abrahamic – Israelite principles of faith and structuring of fairness in ANE's sacred authority and legitimacy (Genesis 14:14; 15:18-21; Exodus 3:12; 19:1-8). By covenant provisions, every Israelite metamorphosed into the religious group beyond their previous individual backgrounds of being strangers to one another. Yet, Israelite society continually witnessed how its members experienced displacement by famine and invasion from other groups in the promised land. Policy evasions against the covenant (with its principles and structures) were interpreted as turning some of the Israelites into becoming the have-less while certain privileges used for marginalization held some Israelites to become the have-more (Genesis 12:1-10; 14:14-20; 15:12-21; 26:1-14). However, taxes and levies continued to feature in ANE world among the Israelites, the Syrians and the Babylonians.

So, the previous known people as Arameans/Syrians but later turned Israelites were organized/institutionalized to pay all tithes of all grains (Deuteronomy 14:22). Israelite ideology of charitable care from tithes, first fruits and offering of crops was then arranged as a religious right by command from *YHWH* (Deuteronomy 23:19-20; 26:1-4,10-15; cp. Nehemiah 10:37-39). It was to both provide and receive charitable care in partisan treatment of the covenanted Israelites. Any contest against the principles and structures turned the opposition into a pressure group with felony. The principles and structures were hierarchically arranged as norms producing roles in the Israelite configuration of other absorbed ANE tribe into an exchange of mutual concerns that the Israelites emphasized. Consequently, the religious right of charitable care giving and receiving instructed that the have-more were to attend to the needs of the have-less for social equilibrium by a religious institutionalization of ethical relationship. Interest-free loans, tithes and first fruits are mentioned in the charitable care that should be provided during different situations for the

[44] T. B. Dozeman, T. Romer, and K. Schmid, *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings,* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 244.
[45] T. B. Dozeman, T. Romer, and K. Schmid, *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings,* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 247, 253-254.

have-less in the Old Testament (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35-38; Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 15:7-11; 16:9-15; 23:19-20; 26:1-15).

Later development of monarchical rule in ancient Israel executed the ethical configuration of the entrepreneurial ventures in the promised land in a religious role with building of a Temple for *YHWH* (2 Samuel 7:1-17; 1 Kings 5:3-6:38). Israelite religion (Yahwism) however continued to battle with abuses of the political economy in its various phases and ages in its institution of ethical considerations in ancient Israel. Brueggemann captures the description by avowing that "the distribution of goods between 'haves' (now often identified as urban elites') and 'have-nots' the disadvantaged and politically marginalized who likely were agrarian peasants" has continually posed an "endlessly problematic question". The relationship was about how the monopolizing and marginalizing propensity among the Israelites created a system that featured an inordinate standard of extravagance in the production, distribution, and consumption of the material wealth in the promised land. It presented a "religious legitimation and sanction to economic disproportion" with the temple featuring propaganda "that matched economic exploitation." Resistance against the abuses in sharing charitable care with the underprivileged then arose from "the prophets who, while claiming theological legitimacy" confronted the menace from the pre-exilic through the exilic and to postexilic periods.[46]

Charitable care in the Hebrew Bible is thus constructed as a right and entitlement of the underprivileged. The issues of socioeconomic interests in ANE setting are thereby considered holy/sacred in the Hebrew Bible. It characterizes today, the Abrahamic traditions (or their norms) which form the setting for the emergence of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Consequently, Christian and Islamic groups engage in charitable care to the have-less from the have-more in flexible and innovative ways. Nigerian religious leaders as the have-more provided the following to their followers as the have-less.

1. OAU (Ife) Trust Cooperative Investment and Credit Society Ltd, an Islamic cooperative society practiced caring for the poor by appealing to Quran 9:60; Quran 2:271; and Quran 90:14 – 18. It granted loans without usury or interest by citing Quran 3:130; Quran 4:161; and Quran 2:275, 278, and 279 to attract scriptural authority to its practices.[47]
2. *Jama'atu Taawunil*, an Islamic organization launched an Islamic market to introduce price control to sales in Iwo town.[48] The Islamic market was reported in several daily newspapers as being located in Iwo town, Osun State. It offered

[46] Walter Brueggemann, "Scripture: Old Testament" in William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott, *The Willey Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Second Edition, (United Kingdom: John Willey, 2019), 16.
[47] Professor A. K. Makinde, a Professor of Islamic Studies in the Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and a member of the Islamic cooperative society was interviewed on 24-09-2024.
[48] Site of *Jama'atu Taawunil* was accessed on 12-09-2024 through https://www.westernpost.ng/jama-atu-taawunil-launches-islamic-market-with-price-control-in-iwo/

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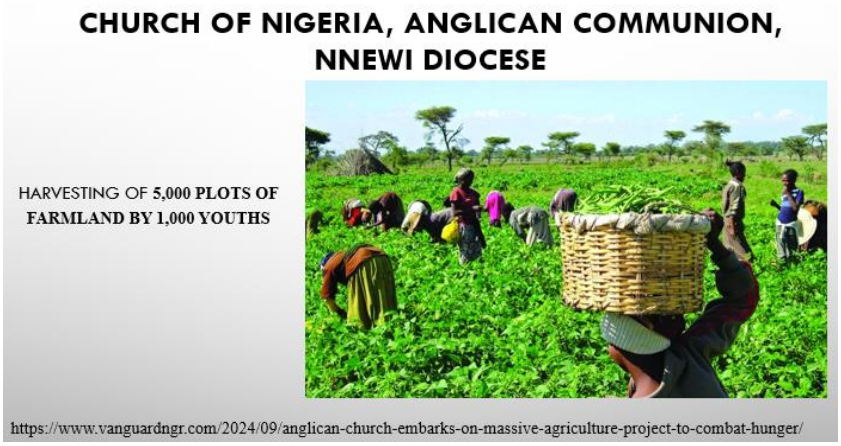
different food items to the inhabitants of the town at low prices.[49] This feat crashed the food prices and made foodstuffs available to buyers at affordable rates.[50]



3. The Anglican Church, Nnewi Diocese also embarked on a massive agricultural project to combat hunger in the land. Its 5,000 plots of farmland were recently harvested by 1,000 youths organized by the Church. The agricultural yield made foodstuffs available to all and sundry in the land at reduced prices.[51]



[49] Islamic market in Iwo accessed on 12-09-2024 through https://dpathtojannah.com/2024/08/16/islamic-market-opens-in-osun-offers-low-prices-on-food-items-see-prices/

[50] Site of Islamic market crashes food prices in Osun was accessed on 12-09-2024 through https://youtu.be/INPZRGEAPqA?si=ZCqYDRNjWWjimhzV

[51] Site of the Nnewi Diocese of the Anglican Communion was accessed on 20-09-2024 through https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/09/anglican-church-embarks-on-massive-agriculture-project-to-combat-hunger/

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4. Ministry of Bishop David Oyedepo opened a care centre to address seasons of distress nationwide. Its ICT/Library was recently erected for L. G. E. A Central Primary School, Dumagi, Edu Kwara State on 09-03-2024.[52]



5. Chris Oyakhilome Foundation International offered a skill acquisition training to 100 youths with grants in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Community Development Area of Lagos State on 26th October 2023.[53]



Conclusion

This study avers that there is no boundary between religion and other socioeconomic systems. Religious entrepreneurship in religious leadership was examined and it found that it had both positive and negative functioning depending on the structuring of the religious organization and socioeconomic rating of the society hosting the religious group. Using the coded structuring of

[52] Site of David O. Oyedepo was accessed on 19-09-2024 through https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/03/updated-oyedepo-opens-care-centres-nationwide-says-nigeria-in-season-of-distress/
[53] Site of Chris Oyakhilome Foundation was accessed on 19-09-2024 through https://cofi.online/about-us/

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convergence, consecration and differentiation, Nigerian Christian and Islamic groups addressed the needs of the underprivileged in flexible and switchable ways by being more dynamic and responsive to the needs of their constituencies. Caring for the have-less from the offerings gathered by the have-more was a strategic device for achieving sacred authority and public legitimacy of the distinctive forms of religious expression featured in the competition among faith-based organizations. Other scholarly works recorded that faith-based organizations instituted urbanization of rural areas with urban planning and architectural designs. They established schools, colleges and faith-based universities. They increased food, livestock and agricultural produce at affordable prices through their faith-based research farmlands. Their medical health centres have also advanced into university medical research and teaching hospitals.