



# Disillusionment of Religion in Contemporary Nigeria in Wole Soyinka's Drama and Relevance of African Worldview as a Corrective Mechanism

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## Abstract

The religiosity of Africans is premised on their view of religion being able to bring a solution to individual and societal challenges, as well giving them hope for a better future. However, the reverse is the case as contemporary religion and religious practices have been considered a 'rip-off' due to diverse and prevailing decadence observed in some religious settings. Therefore, this study aims to portray the reason for this disillusionment of religion in Nigeria using Soyinka's '*The Trials of Brother Jero*'. Anchoring this study on Afrocentrism, the study further explores the relevance of an indigenous African worldview as a corrective mechanism to decadence in the religion settings. The study concludes that the identifiable societal decadence in the religious setting can be corrected if indigenous African worldviews like loyalty, honesty, ubuntu and truthfulness can be upheld, embraced and emphasized as a binding principle despite the diversity of beliefs and practices in the religious sector.

**Keywords:** Religion, Soyinka, culture, disillusionment, literature, drama, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Religion and culture are two key fibres in sustaining the continuous existence of a society. Both culture and religion occupy a vital place in African societies such that the two are intertwined and none really exists on its own. Religion is known to be one of the institutions among humans such that it is confirmed that the greater part of the world's population is religious. Bahatt,(2012:17) describes religion as:

'a structured system of worship, practice, beliefs and ceremonies that centers on one supreme God that made and controls the universe and who is worshipped on the basis of such belief, or the value of the deity that provides groups of people with a solution to the question of ultimate meaning'.

Religion which is a result of the awareness of a power over the universe also 'indicates that spirituality is a part of human nature that needs to be achieved' (Visalo, 2002). Besides being an awareness of a divine power, religion appears to be indispensable to individuals, society and the nation. First, it could be considered as a means of social capital and system for comfort and emotional support. Considering the uncertainties and hopelessness that occur in peoples' life, and the need to find salvation from fear of an awful future, religion and religious faith is expected to

give positive assurance, and reduce and remove anxieties and fears. It provides consolation, reconciliation, gives people emotional support and moral strength all through the trials and downfalls, personal losses and unfair treatments they suffer. Also, it serves as a succour to man to face the crises and issues of life with strength, hope and bravery. It is believed that visiting places of worship function as outlets for letting go of built-up stress and tension. Religion gives solace to the oppressed people by giving them confidence that they can receive redemption and eternal joy in the afterlife. Religion increases the 'God will provide' saying.

Correspondingly, religion is indispensable for social cohesion or integration. Religion helps to solidify and preserve the society in that it strengthens communal harmony of a group sharing the same faith. This integrative role of religion is experienced everywhere worship brings the people together. It is through worship that the people strengthen and reaffirm the ties that keep them together. Social integration, importance of religion is further achieved through collective conscience, by individual and community members taking part in religious ceremonies where they renew their commitment to their religious beliefs. Equally, religion serves as a source of identity. The major role of religion is to give peculiar meaning to life (Luckman, 1983). Religion gives individuals a positive and profound self-identity. It helps people have a sense of belonging and believe that they are not of any value and thus helps the people to alleviate the annoying experiences of life which from time to time force some people to commit suicide. In religious gathering newcomers are integrated into the fold and this gives them a sense of belonging and source of identity. Likewise, as a tool for social control, religion impacts on the conduct of those who believe in them. It reinforces the social order. Religious rites enforce discipline, and this raises the spirits of individuals to act sociably and not merely pursue their own self-centered course of action, which would be subverting and anti-social. Religion makes available a code of conduct, which regulates both the personal and social life of the people. It helps the people to obey social laws by bringing forth the sense of social value in the mind of people to respect the elders and to show compassion towards the emotional state of others, as well as discharging their social obligations faithfully, thus, the role of religion is enormous. It influences political system. Religion has continued to play significant role in the political system of several countries till date. In the contemporary, religion directly and indirectly influences political activities in many countries of the world.

Culture on the other hand, refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, religion, beliefs, attitudes, hierarchies, experience, meanings, values, notions of time, spatial relations, roles, material objects, concepts of the universe, and possessions acquired by a set of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving (Hofstede, 1997). According to Omobola (2014), religion is thoroughly bound up with the traditional system of African life, hence it molds the lives of Africans; in a similar way, religion is shaped by life as well. Consequently, it becomes difficult to distinguish the word 'religion' from culture as religion is also defined as a collection of cultural systems.

Modern African society has found itself in an age of strong cultural, social and economic incorporation, which has brought about inordinate exposure leading to diversity, creativity and dynamics in cultural, religious and social lifestyles of the people and socioeconomic problems. The consultation with religious leaders has become inevitable because of the economic difficulties and tyranny that came along with the integration of African society and since religion and religious leaders are considered by the people a means of reaching God, the maker of the world who alone is believed to have solution to the various challenges in life. Regrettably some these religious leaders who are supposed to use their good offices to provide support and serve as mediators are instead using religion for their selfish gain by merchandising the same (Appleby, 2000). Nigeria, which is one of the most religious countries of the world, as well as some other African countries see religion as the only solution to all life's problems (Lenshie & Abel, 2012).

In Nigeria, religion is heterogeneous, which mainly comprises of Christianity, Islam, and indigenous African religion, although Islam and Christianity are the dominant faiths in the country. It is noted that there exist sub-elements in both Christianity and Islam. Within Christianity, there

are the Catholics, Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, the protestants, the Evangelical Church of Africa, the Pentecostal and a myriad of other local Celestial Church (Osaghae & Suberu 2005). With respect to Islam as well, Ahmadiyya, Sanusiyya, Tijanniyya, and Quadriyya are possible groups that can be identified. The plurality of religious bodies which is aided by the freedom of association and worship in Nigeria have no doubt contributed to many of the societal challenges in the country. Increasing corruption despite religiosity, religion linked to torture centers, terrorism, and sexual assaults are daily reported in the Nigerian media spaces. Moreover, continuous economic imbalances drive thousands of Nigerians to seek consolation in religion, thereby making false religions thrive and enriching themselves at the expense of the vulnerable who seek their help. Consequently, the issue of religious disillusionment is manifested.

Considering the above-mentioned and the fact that literature reflects the truth of a society, the current study aims to explore the portrayal of religious disillusionment in Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, and to further see the relevance of culture in providing solutions to the degenerated religion related social challenges. The rest of this paper is divided into three sections: section 2 discusses the methodology which includes the theoretical framework, biography of Soyinka, and synopsis of the literary text. Section 3 presents the analysis and discussion of the text and discussion on the Africa in context, cultural and philosophical outlook. The conclusion is presented in sections 4.

## **Material and Method**

### **Theoretical Framework and Analytical Technique**

This work is hinged on the pillars of Afrocentrism. The Afrocentric model is a theory grounded on the notion that African people should re-affirm a sense of agency in order to achieve saneness (Asante, 2009), through African identity which is rooted in African culture in all aspects which include: spiritual, religious, social, political and economic. Serequeberhan (1991) notes that even though the colonisation of Africa by Europeans and Arabs altered traditional Africa in many ways, scholars like (Mbiti, 1970; Zahan, 1979; Mazrui, 1986) have argued that the philosophical truthfulness of indigenous Africa remain intact among indigenous continental African people. In this study, the theory of Afrocentricity is adopted because of its relevance to the issue of indigenous culture in providing solution to contemporary decadence in the religious setting. Furthermore, this paper is exploratory and qualitative in that it textually analyzes and interprets Wole's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, and the relevance of an indigenous African worldview. The study explores this literary text because the literature mirrors the society and it has been used as a means of revealing and condemning bad (and where necessary approves good) social realities of contemporary society.

### **A short biography of Wole Soyinka**

Soyinka Akinwande Oluwole is recognized as one of the most adorned African playwrights of the twentieth century. He can be considered as one of the Africa's powerful fictional artists who has written abundantly to enlighten readers on the African cultural ideals and customs. This exceptional Nobel prize winner was born on July 13, 1934 in Abeokuta, Nigeria. He was a professor of literature at the University of Ife, Nigeria, now known as Obafemi Awolowo University. *The Trials of Brother Jero* is one of his prominent plays. He is also an eminent poet, novelist, critic, and theatre director. Oluwole has a strong sense and roots in Yoruba culture, an element of life that has filled much of his work. Hence, he seeks out to make the worldview of his native Yoruba pertinent to his work as an artist who uses European methods (George, 1992).

### **Synopsis of the play**

The play starts with the protagonist, Brother Jero, who provides the readers background information on how he became the priest merely because of his appearance- thick long hair and beard. He discloses how he turns out to be fond of the profession. He additionally reveals how

the trade has come to be fashionable and how professionals in the trade attempt to outsmart one another in getting lands on the beach and enticing gullible and ignorant members. He further uncovers the scheme he employs to acquire the land by the beachfront for the old prophet, his master, who unknowingly thinks Jero schemes all other rivals out only for him to own the land. But little does he know that Brother Jero supports no one but himself. For this particular reason, the old prophet places a curse on him, saying that the daughters of discord will be his downfall and ruin. Hence, the play is centered on the near fulfilment of the curse Jero's master placed on him.

The playwright further reveals a couple named Amope and Chume. Amope is a business woman, Brother Jero bought a velvet cape from her and promises to make the payment in three months but defaults. Chume, Amope's husband is a Chief Messenger at the local government office in the community. He is a member and an apprentice in Brother Jero's church situated on the beach. Brother Jero cleverly exploits the ignorance, materialistic tendencies and stupidity of Chume and all other members of his church. He constantly deceives them with prophecies of a better life and promotion in their various pursuits.

Meanwhile, Chume has long wanted to beat his nagging wife, Amope, in order to curtail her and so she can desist from such infuriating behaviour. Nevertheless, Brother Jero stops him from beating his wife; not for Chume's advantage, but in order for him to keep Chume in endless enslavement. Interestingly, Chume eventually understands that Brother Jero has been deceiving him all the while having nullified all Jero's statements that keep him in servitude, when it dawns on him that Brother Jero finally permits him to beat his nagging wife, Amope, in order to free himself (Jero) of his creditor (Amope). When Chume becomes aware of his foolishness, he seeks revenge from Brother Jero, the playwright presents the perverseness and lack of knowledge prepared by no other person but by Jero himself.

## **Results Analysis**

This section highlights and discusses identifiable reasons for the disillusionment in contemporary religion as portrayed in the texts. These include commercialization and exploitation, lack of contentment and materialistic consciousness, betrayal and weakening of mutual trust, moral bankruptcy, and falsehood, hypocrisy, and manipulation

### **Commercialization and Exploitation**

To commercialize means to trade or exploit something for the purpose of making profit. In this case it is the trading of religion to make material or monetary gains. It needs be stated that making gain from religion is contrary to the intent of religion, and with such on the rise in the country is a serious social issue. This is deduced from Brother Jero's word as extracted below;

Extract A:

1. Jero: ...I was born a natural prophet. And I grew to love the trade and JERO: 'I am glad I got here before any customers - I mean worshippers - well, customers if you like'. 'I always get that feeling every morning that I am a shop-keeper waiting for customers' (Soyinka 1998).

The ideas of trade, customer and shopkeeper relate to commerce, thus it can be asserted that the Jero's so called work of God as a prophet is more of a business to him than being in a position to help those that are in spiritual need. This is the typical state of religion in Nigeria today where the selling of holy water, anointing oil, anointed handkerchiefs, miracle soap, celebration of worship centres annual anniversaries, payment of certain fees to see some spiritual leader to be prayed for, or to dine with a religious leader in order to receive a miracle are prevalent. Al Chukwuma and Clement (2014) also note that proliferation of Faith-Based Organizations, and religious prebendalism, implies religious business 'decorated with flavour'. These religious leaders

merchandise faith and abuse grace. The faithful followers are often encouraged to make financial pledges to the ministry of the so called man of God as a symbol of their dedication to the assembly. It is often believed that the level of a particular follower's financial obligation determines the quantity of divine favour he or she will receive. They employ aggressive publicity, advertising and promotion to persuade thousands of people to patronise them. Without doubt, Soyinka's satiric display in this regard exposes this menace in the religious setting, this is an irony, it's pathetic and it is a religious disillusionment as it negates the expectation of several religious individuals and also contrary to the instruction of the Lord and Master of the church in the Bible 'Freely you have received, freely you must give' (Matthew 10:8). This infiltration of trading spiritual matters in the religious settings of the society has led observers to raise serious ethical and moral concerns (Al Chukwuma & Clement, 2014).

### **Lack of Contentment and Materialistic Consciousness**

*The Trials of Brother Jero* satirizes the culture on lack of contentment and materialism observed in the contemporary religious environment in Nigeria, contrary to the expectation of the Holy book on godliness and contentment, which are the virtues of a Christian. It can also be said that a materialistic ideology brought in by many contemporary religious leaders has continued to fuel material consciousness of the flocks over spirituality as well as promoting lack of contentment. For instance, religious prayers have been emphasized to be a tool to attaining higher and better socioeconomic status and material possessions. However, while prayer is necessary, the extent of emphasis on praying for material possession as against spiritual issues as seen in contemporary Nigeria only portraying the worldly and perhaps materialistic consciousness. Equally, the sermons and prayers of many present-day religious front-runners have been focused on materialistic desires, prosperity and a better life. No one seems to care about virtue and moral uprightness, but the focus is on material possessing prayers in order to meet the unquenchable wants of humans in a consumerist society. Soyinka satirizes this disillusionment in religion using the prayers of Chume when he briefly takes over the service in Jero's absence. He prays:

Extract: B

1. CHUME: ... Tell our wives not to give us trouble. And give us money to have a happy home. Give us money to satisfy our daily necessities. Make you no forget those of us who dey struggle daily. Those who be clerk today, make them Chief Clerk tomorrow. Those who are Messenger today, make them Senior Service tomorrow. Yes Father, those who are Messenger today, make them Senior Service tomorrow. Those who are petty trader today, make them big contractor tomorrow. Those who dey sweep street today, give them their own big office tomorrow. I say those who dey walka today, give them their own bicycle tomorrow. Those who have bicycle today, they will ride their own car tomorrow. I say those who dey push bicycle, give them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow (Soyinka 1998).

The fundamental teaching of Christianity is to reconnect humanity with God, as people have erred against God and being corrupted. Materialistic consciousness and the gospel of prosperity is contrary to the Christian religion. Similarly, Chukwuma and Chinoye (2015), note that the religion seeks heavenly realities rather than earthly gains which are a means to an end. The prosperity gospel is an unusual doctrine from the traditional version of the Bible. This perception of religion stimulates the organizing of several religions prayers programmes. Independent ministries and Pentecostal churches in Nigeria also organise a special weekly prayer programme or services that run through a whole day with the central purpose of bringing prosperity to its members, healing, anointing and breakthrough. Unfortunately, according to Iheanacho and Ughaerumba (2016) these programmes are dominated by the economically disadvantaged people, including the unemployed persons, sick people, poor, women and children. Odoguje (2016) discloses that people in such socio-economic conditions often spend valuable time and energy parading in the

programmes. The attendance of multiple of these programmes, often have a negative health impact like hypertension, diabetes and psychiatric problems. While this negates the application of hard work with prayer, principles of success, and the overall attentiveness and efficiency to duty and general productivity input and output of both attendees and non-attendees becomes totally reduced Olatunji (2016). Besides, many flocks have been overtaken by the preaching of these 'prosperity ministers'. Thereby triggering in them the desire to get wealth by any means possible, including rituals, frauds and financial corruptions and drug paddling amongst others. Besides, many flocks have been overtaken by the preaching of these prosperity ministers. Thereby triggering in them the desire to get wealth by any means possible, including rituals, frauds and financial corruptions and drug paddling amongst others.

### **Betrayal and Weakening of Mutual Trust**

It is known that all social interaction is a process of acting on expectation which builds up into a variety of processes which include trust. Hence the place of trust in human relations and interaction in all sectors of life (family, community, religion, business and governance) cannot be overemphasized. Trust is reciprocal in that no matter the calibre or hierarchy of people or entity involved, everyone is expected to act according to the agreement or expectation on them (Ademilokun, 2014). For instance, trust between employee and employer affect such things as working conditions, wages and relationships between people. Within the religious setting, trust issues are expected between the senior pastor and junior pastor and as well as between the congregants and their religious leader. This relationship is rooted in ideals and values, but when these ideals are subject of wrong doings then trust is violated. The concern about the decline of trust, distrust and violation is trusted as seen in the world and is also an issue with religious settings which is expected to be distinct from the world. Instances of clerics betraying the colleagues and congregants is increasing daily in the church. The playwright in *The Trials of Brother Jero* also expresses the disillusionment of religion and moral failure of religious persons through the betrayal of trust that occurs between clerics, and between clerics and their members. The words of Jero, clearly show the betrayal between a senior pastor and his subordinate.

Extract C:

1. JERO: My Master, the same one who brought me up in prophetic ways staked his claim and won a grant of land. ... I helped him, with a campaign led by six dancing girls from the French territory, all dressed as Jehovah's Witnesses. What my old master did not realize was that I was really helping myself (Soyinka, 145).

Here, the old prophet is the preacher who is considered to be Jero's spiritual mentor. The old prophet staked out a territory for himself on the beach. The old prophet, his master trusts him with the documentation of the land that belongs to their church, but Jero put his own name in the document in the place of the old prophet's name and he is left without a land for his church and driving him away from his patch. This is similar to the situation where location, pastor deceitfully converts the senior pastor's ministry to his own. This trauma of being betrayed is reflected in the reaction of the old prophet to Jero.

2. Old Prophet: Ungrateful wretch! Is this how you repay the long years of training I have given you? To drive me, your old tutor, off my piece of land ... telling me I have lived beyond my time. Ha! May you be rewarded in the same manner. May the Wheel come right round and find you just as helpless as you make me now (Soyinka, 146).

The theme of betrayal between cleric and their member is further emphasised in the interaction between Jero and Amope. In this case, Brother Jero bought a Velvet Cape from her promising to pay for it, but it has been three months and the debt is not paid. Moreover, he keeps on avoiding her something that shows that he is not willing to pay for the Velvet cape.

3. JERO: ... How does one maintain his dignity when the daughter of Eve forces him to leave his own house through a window? God curse that woman! I never thought she would dare affront the presence of a man of God. One pound eight for this little cape. It is sheer robbery. (Soyinka, 153)

Similarly, Usman (2000) pointed out cleric-member betrayal with respect to confidentiality. The author notes that some insensitive and unprofessional pastors betray their people's trust and the essence of congregational ministry in a case where church members find that some deeply personal issue, they have shared with the pastor becomes public knowledge as the theme of a sermon. These acts of betrayal are clearly against the teaching of Christ on honesty and the ethics of the Christian profession. As rightly pointed out, such betrayal shakes people's confidence in their religious leaders.

### **Moral Bankruptcy**

The contemporary society both locally and internationally, is grappling with declining morals which includes sexual immorality. Sexual immorality informs lust, premarital sex and sex outside marriage, and sexual predation among others that are ravaging the society and it cuts across all generations and has sadly found its way into religious setup. Surprisingly, many clerics who are expected to be touched bearers of sound religion and moral ethics have been found wanting in this regard, having been involved in various sexual scandals. This is the struggle and the reality of so-called men of God, which is unexpected and unacceptable to society. Soyinka portrays this situation of moral decadence in the church and of clerics using the character of Jero in different extracts stated below:

Extract D:

1. Some prophets I could name gained their present beaches by getting women penitents to shake their bosoms in spiritual ecstasy.... My master, the same one who brought me up in prophetic ways staked his claim and won a grant of land. I helped him' with a campaign led by six dancing girls from the French territory, all dressed as Jehovah S witnesses. (Ibid., pp. 145-1 46.)

From extract 1, Prophet Jero, in agreement with his master's use of showcasing of women as a way of gaining popularity for their churches. This character of Jero represents the case with several pastors in the modern-day society, who all in the name of worship use various tactics which include getting women to shake their bosoms (breasts) in spiritual ecstasy, and women who wear skimpy, miniskirts and other inappropriate wears in order to attract membership to their churches, such that the church is almost like a club-house. This is called seduction in the church. The church that is meant to correct indecency in the society is now the proponent of licentiousness.

Another instance of the moral bankruptcy of Jero is deduced in his lust for women, his admitting to it and insincere prayer regarding his lustful desire and weakness in his desire for women. This lust causes him a lot of distraction while ministering or communicating with another person. His inordinate affection for women has often resulted in embarrassment, this is portrayed on two different instances in the play. The first is a beautiful lady returning from the swimming pool who very neatly provokes him into temptation and the second instance is his neighbour whom he chases because he could not resist the sight of her attractive legs.

2. JERO: He knew very well that I had one weakness - women. Not my fault, mind you. You must admit that I am rather good-looking (Soyinka, 146).
3. JERO: The young girl crosses the stage again. She has just had her swim and the difference is remarkable. Clean, wet, shiny face and hair. She continues to wipe herself with her wrapper as she walks. Jero follows her all the way with his eyes and thinking

within himself saying every morning, every day I witness this divine transformation, O Lord... (He shakes his head suddenly and bellows (shouted) Pray brother Jerobroam, pray! Pray for strength against temptation.

4. Jero: Against this one weakness, this weakness, O Abraham....
5. Jero: Tear the image from my heart. Tear this love for the daughters of Eve....
6. Jero: Burn out this lust for the daughters of Eve.
7. Brother Jero, as the singing starts .... This turns out, some ten or so yards later, to be a woman, sash tightened around her waist, wrapper pulled so high up that half of her thigh is exposed ..... Jeroboam, who has followed the woman's exposed limbs with quite distressed concentration, comes suddenly to himself and kneels sharply, muttering

In the above extracts, Jero is seen to lack moral discipline, like many religious leaders in the contemporary Nigeria, Jero shows great weakness for women. Beyond this lust struggle, many religious leaders in the contemporary Nigeria have actually gone into the shameful act of infidelity and sexual molestation.

### **Falsehood, Hypocrisy, and Manipulation**

The last issue of religious disillusionment considered in this study is falsehood and hypocrisy of religious leaders and their members, which is also a severe social problem, and which is contrary to religious ethics of truthfulness and uprightness. In the contemporary Nigerian society, so many clerics do not practise what they preach to others, they declare false prophecy and miracles and manipulate their member into mental and psychological slavery for their selfish gain. Soyinka, in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, Soyinka reveals these hypocritical and manipulative acts through the character of Jero, the self-acclaimed prophet.

Extract E:

1. JERO: Praise the Lord for the gift of reason and gift of life. Then praise him also for your coming promotion, yes, your coming promotion for this is the glad tidings of which I am the humble bearer.
2. CHUME (hesitant). Promotion?
3. JERO. Of whose glad tidings I am made humble bearer. I send you, Prophet Jero, said the Lord. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall inherit the kingdom. Make your peace with Brother Chume and take with you this peace-offering, the good tidings of his coming promotion.
4. CHUME. Promotion? How can?
5. JERO (sternly) Do you doubt, Brother Chume? Do you doubt my prophecy? Has your sojourn among lunatics made you forget who prophesied war and have we not lived to see it come to pass? Do you trust in me and praise the Lord or do you confess yourself a waverer at this hour of trial?
6. CHUME. Praise the Lord. (Soyinka, 70)

The conversation between Jero and Chume reveals that the promotion Jero announced was different from the promotion Chume actually received. Instead Jero raised him to a Holy prophet status and eventually becomes a member of his team of prophets. He knows how to get what he wants in a manipulative way. To his followers, when prophet Jero is lying, he is simply uttering the truth. A man of God is expected to be honest, but Brother Jero's speech is a combination of lies and half-truths. Likewise, Jero's falsehood is also seen in extract 7 below when he lies about his actual place of residence. He lies even to his own assistant that he has no house and he sleeps at the beach, but in reality, he has a house somewhere in Ajete settlement area. This falsehood



is revealed in extract 7-9. In addition, the falsity of Jero is also revealed when he spoke a lie on receiving revelation from God to change the name of his church.

7. JERO: I don't know how she found out my house
8. JERO: .... Most of my disciples believes that I sleep on the beach, that is if he thinks I sleep at all. Most of them believe the same but, for myself, I prefer my bed. Much more comfortable. And it gets rather cold on the beach at nights. Still, it does them good to believe that I am something of an ascetic. ...
9. CHUME: He is a liar... 'E no be man of God'. 'E say `in sleep for beach whether `e rain or cold but that one too na big lie'. This man get house and `e sleep there every night.

Hypocrisy of contemporary religious leaders is also seen in the double standards of Jero in cases when they make decisions or give advice to suit their selfish purposes such that ethics and biblical standard it betrayed. Such double standard is deduced in the extracts 11- 27 below when Jero prevents Chume from beating Amope, his wife, and claims that it is not the will of God, but when he discovers that his wife is the trader to whom he owed money he granted him permission to beat her in order to free himself from the siege Amope lays to his house.

10. Chume: Brother Jero you must let me beat her.
11. Jero: What!
12. Chume: (desperately) Just once, prophet, Just once.
13. Jero: Brother Chume!
14. Chume: Just once. Just one sound beating and swear not to ask again.
15. Jero: Apostate. Have I not told you the will of god in this matter?
16. Chume: But I have got to beat her, prophet. You must save me from madness.
17. Jero: I will, But only if you obey me.
18. JERO: Then why do you then harden your heart? The Lord says that you may neither beat the good woman whom he has chosen to be your wife, to be your cross in your period of trial, and will you disobey him?
19. CHUME: No, Brother Jero.
20. JERO: Ah, that is the only way. But er.... I wonder really what the will of god would be in this matter. After all, Christ himself was not averse to using the whip when occasion demanded it.
21. CHUME: (eagerly) No, he did not hesitate.
22. JERO: In that case, since Brother Chume, your wife seems such a wicked, willful sinner, I think .....
23. CHUME: Yes, Holy one? ... .
24. JERO: You must take her home to night ...
25. CHUME: Yes
26. JERO: And beat her

Likewise, the earlier counsel of Jero to Chume not to beat his wife is a manipulative strategy which is similar to what many contemporary religious leaders are using. As rightly confessed by Jero in the extract below he did that to keep Chume unsatisfied, mindless, helpless and to keep him from leaving his church.

27. JERO: ... I know they are dissatisfied because I keep them dissatisfied. Once they are full they won't come again. Like my good apprentice, Brother Chume. He wants to beat his wife, but I won't let him. If I do, he will become contented and then that's one of my flocks gone forever. As long as he doesn't beat her, he comes here feeling helpless... (Soyinka, 1964:20).

In addition, Jero's manipulative act is further seen in his interaction and action while he prays for one of his members, a politician and Chume his assistant appears with a cutlass:

28. JERO: Protect him therefore. Protect him when he must lead this country as his great ancestors have done. He comes from the great warriors of the land. In his innocence he was not aware of his heritage. But you know everything and you plan it all. There is no end, no beginning...  
[Chume rushes in, brandishing a cutlass.]
29. CHUME: Adulterer! Woman-theif! Na today a go finish you!  
[Jero looks round]
30. JERO: God save us! [Flees]  
[MEMBER/unaware of what is happening]: Amen.  
[Chume follows out Jero, murder-bent]
31. MEMBER: Amen, Amen. [Open his eyes] Thank you Proph... [He looks right, left, back, front, but he finds the Prophet has really disappeared.]  
Prophet! Prophet! [Turns sharply and rapidly in every direction shouting.] prophet where are you? Where have you gone? Prophet! Don't leave me, Prophet, don't leave me!  
[He bows his head, standing. Jeroboam enters quite collected, and points to the convert.]
32. JERO: You heard him. With your own ears you heard him. By tomorrow, the whole town will have heard about the miraculous disappearance of Brother Jero. Testified to and witnessed by no less a person than one of the elected Rulers of the country...
33. JERO: Good... He is falling asleep. When I appear again to him he'll think I have just fallen from the sky. Then I'll tell him that Satan just sent one of his emissaries into the world under the name of Chume, and that he had better put him in a strait-jacket at once...And so the day is saved. (Soyinka, 178)

Brother Jero, just like the modern day religious leaders is eloquent and has a powerful mastered speech pattern used to mischievously manipulate his members' psychology. Usman (2000) describes manipulation as basically controlling the life of a person or group unknown to them. Equally, these people contribute to their own manipulation through their inherent ignorance and gullibility. They do not join in the liberation process, they rather remain latent and allow themselves to be manipulated with the promise of a miracle and prophecy to enable them to overcome the severe economic situation they face in the society in which they live.

Religion as an intangible institution, no doubt can be used as a tool for character formation and reformation, and peace and harmonious cohabitation amongst humanity. However, religion and religious practises in the current Nigerian mirror below expectation of what it is meant to stand for, posing a threat to morality, human welfare and humanity in general, and it has been a source of concern to many people. There is an urgent need to stabilize the moral position of the society. A functioning society requires a set of values to bind it together no matter the religion being practised is or social status (Nicolaidis, 2014; 2015). This set of binding values appears not to be found in religion because of the many beliefs in the way religious worship is carried out. Considering the ills in religion and the need to find a common ground to reposition the damaged morale of the society, a need to look inward at the indigenous moral compasses of indigenous African society as a tool for societal regeneration. This is based on the argument that there are features of African worldview that addresses the ills discussed in the contemporary religious space of Nigeria.

### **Yoruba Cultural and Philosophical Worldview for Correcting Decadence in Religion**

Worldview presents an explanation and interpretation of the world and their applications to life (Ajoke et al., 2014). According to Heylighen (2000) philosophical outlook is defined as a psychological model of reality- a framework of beliefs, attitudes and ideas about the world, ourselves and life through which an individual interprets the world, it's happening and interacts

with and responds to it. African philosophy can be best understood as a traditional philosophy, a set of cultural practices and narratives that attempt to explain the causes and the nature of things that affect the physical and the spiritual world (Gbadegesin, 1998). African philosophy is rich in proverbs and aphorisms, and it is committed to a search for wisdom and love. According to Olanipekun (2017), these philosophies can be said to be critical thinking and reflective about the concepts and principles which are being used to bring together experiences in religion, morals in social and political life, in history, law and also the natural sciences.

Like every other race across the world, the Yoruba people also have rich philosophical ideas and a worldview that influences their way of life. They have views that are evident in their values, beliefs, customs, social behaviours and practices, and this is manifested in their music, arts, political institutions, language, local economy, festivals, family structure, literature, ceremonies and other related activities (Odejebi, 2014). Equally, in Nigeria, the indigenous Yoruba society's worldview are associated and relevant to different strata of the society, be it religion, education, politics, economy or commerce, family, child training, law, order and justice among others. Oyesile (2003) notes that traditional Yoruba societies were able to achieve significant social order because of their firm observance to certain principles of life, which are based on the right values, an element of African philosophy. Olanipekun (2017) also buttressed that in the Yoruba society, the ethical and moral values are sets of institutional values which guide and direct their patterns of life, such that it assists individuals in achieving moral excellence which is an important goal of human existence. These socio-ethical indigenous Yoruba societal values are inexhaustible, however, and the study appraises the relevance of Yoruba cultural and philosophical worldview for correcting decadence in religion with respect to ethical values such as generosity and benevolence in the place of exploitation, trust and trustworthiness in place of betrayal and weakening of trust, moral uprightness in place of moral bankruptcy and truthfulness in place of falsehood and hypocrisy which are causes of the disillusionment in religion.

The Yoruba philosophy of generosity and benevolence teaches the act of concern about one another's wellbeing in the society. Everyone ensures that communal wellbeing is promoted, and individual wellbeing is indeed protected. Here, the main focus of individual actions becomes the communal wellbeing, such that an individual in the community acts with an unconscious notion of communal interest. In this way there is a healthy relationship among the people in the society. This philosophy is similar to the concept of Ubuntu which is an African worldview that promotes the common good of a society, and which also includes humanness as an important element of human growth (Nicolaidis, 2005, 2014, 2015; Venter, 2004). According to Du Toit et al (2006), Ubuntu is established in a setting of interdependence and severe need. It entails a set of ideals that guide and direct the patterns of life, which involve being neighbourly and having some social consciousness.

An Ubuntu worldview according to (Mashau & Kgatle, 2019) is referred to as anti-egoistic because it discourages people from seeking their own good without respect for, or to the disadvantage of others and the community, but rather endorses the spirit that one should live for others. With respect to religion, the Ubuntu worldview is applicable to both leaders and followers, as it infers that leaders of the congregation need to value people regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, and social status. The dogma from Ubuntu, which includes solidarity, care, life, hope and accompaniment as well as economic justice, when knitted together, can help the African church to be as discerning as possible against all forms of teaching that seek to exploit and abuse religion. If this virtue is embraced, commercialization and exploitation as seen by religious leaders will have no place in the current or future society.

Also, the virtue of contentment which is an aspect of inner beauty is central to the Yoruba worldview. This virtue is summed up in the Yoruba proverb: *Itelorun baba iwa* (contentment is the father of all behaviours). This proverb confirms the quality the Yoruba people place on contentment, as it informs one that contentment is the most esteemed of all human qualities.

Yoruba people frown at dissatisfaction and believe that those who are not content with what they possess are only chasing shadows by their acts as their material acquisitions eventually add up to nothing. Thus, Yoruba condemns all manner of excessive opportunism which is essentially the case with brother Jero and some religious leaders in Nigeria together with their flocks. Yoruba culture warns against such a lifestyle using the following proverb: *Èja wẹwẹ ló òtàn ẹja òlá lẹ sínú àwọ̀n* (It is the attempts at preying on the little fishes that lure the big fish into the net). According to Olanipekun (2017), good character which includes contentment is of higher value than anything. Contentment will prevent leadership greed and the desire to exploit the vulnerable in religious settings.

Likewise, in traditional Africa, especially Yoruba people believe and emphasise the idea of loyalty and trustworthiness. According to Abimbola (1976) loyalty is one of the Yoruba core values in social relations. To the Yoruba people, relationship appears to have strong implications for individuals and for the entire community, because it has to do with life in general. Thus, it is conditioned by factors such as faithfulness, moral values, behavioural conduct and personal lifestyle. Loyalty is staying true to someone, it is being faithful to one's family, friends or ideals when life is tough or good. The virtue of loyalty helps one to build relationships that last forever. This is against the behaviour of Brother Jero, who betrays his mentor, the old prophet instead of being loyal and trustworthy, which led to their separation. Yoruba condemns betrayal by warning and cautioning people against such behaviours due to its repercussions, because such behaviour is 'accursed'. This is clearly inferred in the Yoruba proverb that says *E ni ti oba da ile, a ba ile lo* which means the covenant-breaker will disappear with the earth). Imbibing this value among religious person will help people in the religious setting to deal with themselves, with caution and in total honesty and reliability. Central to all social norms in traditional African society is moral uprightness. Moral principles in traditional African societies were complete, and shared morality was the cement of society. Joseph (2014) states that sex restrictions form a code of sexual conduct that is so highly respected that any deviation from it is deeply detested. Mbiti (1969) says; the people are very careful to make any departure from the established norm regarding all aspects of sex. Fornication, adultery, incest, rape, seduction all constitutes sexual crimes in a community.

## Conclusion

Religion as an intangible institution no doubt can be used as a tool for character reformation, peace and harmonious cohabitation amongst humanity. However, the reverse is the case as religion and religious practises in current Nigeria constitute as a threat to morality, social welfare and humanity in general. The study employed Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* to X-tray the causes of this disillusionment that has encroached into the religious setting in the country knowing that literature is often used to mirror a society. One basic issue reflecting on these reasons for this disillusionment is the diversity of beliefs and mode of worship within Christianity and further leading to differences in the set of values that could be used by religious individuals to make society better. This shortcoming therefore buttresses the relevance of an indigenous African worldview that is generally acceptable and employable among religious societies in order to eradicate identified decadence. Some of these African worldviews include the Ubuntu philosophy, loyalty, trustworthiness and integrity. Consequently, more effort is needed to educate leaders and ensure that especially the religious leaders and their followers embrace these values with a view to practicing religion that meets the need of individuals and the society in general.

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