

RELEVANCE OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTHS' ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NIGERIA

Roseline Uchenna Okeke, Ph.D

Department of Religious Studies

Imo State University, Owerri

Email: roseleokeke@gmail.com

Abstract

The study is poised to examine the potentials of Christian ethical principles towards the goal of developing entrepreneurial behavior among Nigerian youths. One of the indicators of development is the growth of entrepreneurship. In spite of the increasing consensus that ethics generally is pervasive and it is relevant to every aspect of human endeavour, little recognition is given to the mechanisms of inculcating entrepreneurial behavior among our youths through the application of Christian ethical principles. This paper is geared towards filling this vacuum. Engaging the tool of critical analyses of selected literatures, a keen observation of some students of Imo State University, Owerri, who are adherents of various Christian groups; and premising the work on Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the paper examined the responses of youths to the need of being enterprising and the impacts of Christian ethical principles to achieving this goal. It was discovered that participating in religious activities do not enhance entrepreneurial behavior, nor do they promote entrepreneurship; but Christian ethical principles as manifested in people's work ethics, conducts and character do.

Key words: Entrepreneurship, Christian Ethics, Work Ethics, Development.

Introduction

Youth unemployment has become a scourge, not only to the under developed and developing nations, but also to the developed economies. This problem is attributed to, among other factors the increase in mechanization of production processes which is occasioned by the rapid advancement in technological know- how. While these technological breakthroughs help in reducing the stress of production and increase the volume of production, they unfortunately take over the job opportunities that were hitherto handled by human beings. This problem is compounded by the day as new advances like the manufacturing of robots; artificial intelligence and advancement in electronics unfold.

The Nigerian situation seems to be worsened by the skewed educational system and distorted moral values, especially since her Independence in 1960. The educational system has been largely certificate-oriented. The school

curricula have downplayed practical agricultural exercises and hand craft, especially since the explosion of the ‘oil boom’. This has patterned the orientation of an average youth towards certificate acquisition, instead of knowledge and crafts acquisition. There is however a consensus among scholars and economic experts that entrepreneurship is a major answer to the problem of unemployment as well as a catalyst for economic development. This view buttresses Adam Smith’s assertion that any wealth of any nation that is regulated by importation and consumption is faulty and counter-productive. According to Adam Smith, a nation’s wealth is determined by the streams of goods and services it creates (Soares (ed), 2007). This informs why youth entrepreneurship has become a *desideratum* in Nigeria as in other nations of the world.

For some years now, it has dawned on the authorities in Nigeria that the only way out of the embarrassingly high youth unemployment is to encourage entrepreneurial education; but in a nation where paper qualification has been the only viable way of getting gainfully employed, it is not easy to get people effect a paradigm shift in their way of seeing life.

This is where religious ethical reorientation comes handy. Man is a religious animal. The dogmas inculcated through religious beliefs are more long lasting than any other impression. Though all ethics refer to normative science of human conduct (Okeke, 2015; William, 1961), the special concern of Christian ethics is to relate an understanding of God and Christian belief system to the conducts of men and women. It is the core values that have been extrapolated from the life and teachings of Jesus that form the foundation of the moral life for the Christian, provide guidelines for his behavior and decision-making and constitute basis for self- examination and judgment. Christian ethics, like all ethics focus on principles of moral values, but it is particularly based on Christian faith and its values. Ethics in practice makes so much sense in everyday living as well as in business. Everyone wants business to be fair clean and beneficial to the society. For this to happen, organizations need to abide by the ethics or acceptable norms of engagement and fair practices and competition; all of which will benefit the consumer, the organization and the society. In entrepreneurship, people engage in small scale business transactions which are expected to profit the individual and benefit the society in return.

The paper focuses on the relationship between Christian ethics and an aspect of economic behavior, particularly entrepreneurial behavior. To respond appropriately to the issues in this study, the following questions are necessary: Does religious ethics have any effect on the level of one’s economic performance? To what extent does application of Christian ethical principles in business determine the sustainability of the business?

The analysis is contextualized among the Nigerian youths whom unemployment and economic recession are leaving stranded in the journey of life. Encouraging entrepreneurship with the right attitude and best practices as espoused by Christian ethical principles can rescue our youths from the present quagmire of unemployment and poverty

Conceptual Clarifications

As this paper is a contribution to the global current efforts to strengthen responsible enterprises, different terms are used: Entrepreneurship, Sustainable development, Ethics and Christian ethics.

Ethics strives to answer questions such as ‘what should I do?’ How should I act’?, How should a community of people act’? Ethics also strives to answer the questions as to what is good behavior and just action. Therefore, ethics concerns all areas of life. Ethics can be based on philosophical or religious values such as Buddhist, Christian and Islamic worldviews. The focus of this study is on Christian ethics and its impact on entrepreneurship. **Christian ethics** is the evaluation of human conducts that is based on Christian faith and its values. **Sustainable Development** is defined by Christoph Stuckelberger et al as development process that employs present generation to live a life in dignity without endangering the life of future generations or the non-human environment. From a Christian ethical point of view, sustainability is a God-centered fundamental premise, an axiom that gives orientation to the ethical values and norms. Sustainability is a pillar and a manifestation of the Christ-centered principle.

Enterprise is an organizational unit which produces trades, markets or recycles products or services. It can be a business company for profit, an enterprise can as well be a non-profit institution (a social enterprise,) a private or state owned company. It can also be a small, medium or large entity, a single unit or a conglomerate of companies.

Entrepreneur is a male or female head and/or operational leader of an enterprise. He or she can be a founder, owner, president of the board or manager of the business. An entrepreneur actually through the value of innovation creates a new business with the readiness to bear most of the risks and enjoy most of the benefits. **Entrepreneurship** is an important driver of economic growth and development in any society. According to Onuoha (2007), entrepreneurship is the practice of starting a new organization or revitalizing mature organizations

Literature Review

There are relatively few number of similar studies on the impact of Christian ethics on economic growth or entrepreneurship. Even then, such few have

different areas of emphases and varied scales of variables. Cars well and Rolland (2007) have studied the influence of different religions on the possibility of becoming an entrepreneur. Contextualizing the survey data in New Zealand, they discovered that increase in activities and ethics in a society does not have negative effect on entrepreneurship. In the same vein, Anderson, Drakopoluou-Dod and Scott (2000) examine the role of religious values in the formation of a business culture in Britain in the 1980's. De George, R.T (1990) avers that despite the earlier belief that religion, (including Christian ethics) and business do not mix, neither does the later support entrepreneurial culture. Although these authors agree that being ethical and engaging in moral activities do not impair ones success in entrepreneurship, instead they support entrepreneurial culture. However, they failed to state the aspects of ethics that support entrepreneurial culture. These studies have addressed this vacuum by emphasizing the place of religious ethics, and particularly the place of Christian ethics in the success of entrepreneurship among Nigerian youths.

The study of religion in the realm of social science, especially economics is a relatively new phenomenon (Njoku, 2014). On this note, it is generally believed that Max Weber's theses on *the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in 1905 pioneered the study of the role of Christian ethic on economics. Protestant work ethics is a concept that is used in economics, history, sociology and theology. It was primarily the ideology of the Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin which states that it is not only priestly work, but all legitimate work that humans do to earn a living or any vocation can glorify God. Protestant work ethic therefore insists that vocation is ordained by God. It also emphasized the values of hard work, discipline, (especially discipline in the use of time) and frugality or a strong propensity to save, abstinence from worldly pleasures as key elements of work ethic that enhance economic development. Weber, however, in his thesis proved that there is a close affinity between work ethic and early capitalist entrepreneurship. It was demonstrated that these values made a significant positive impact in the Western attitude to work and employment (Sinclair et al, 1988). This explains why this paper avers that, Christian values play important roles in people's commitment to work and in the growth of business organizations.

Referring to Adam Smith's *theory of moral sentiments*, Anderson (1988) highlights that Christian religious beliefs provide strong ethical incentives to apply certain moral restraints in business. He went further to show that applying such moral values as trust, honesty, benevolence and avoidance of violence do not only boost the business landscape, but also stabilizes the civil society as well. Smith's theory is germane to this study because entrepreneurship is all about doing business. It involves the process of

designing, launching and running a new and often times, small business with the goal of making profit. The values above, as espoused by Smith constitute the core values of the principles of Christian ethics in general, and work ethic in particular. All religions as a matter of fact, endeavor to instill some values, morals and behavioral framework in their adherents. These are the values that some people eventually exhibit in their businesses.

In today's Nigeria where almost every sector of the economy is portraying gloomy signs of bankruptcy, entrepreneurship is increasingly being viewed as a potential engine of economic growth and development. Many of our youths whose self-esteem is at the verge of total collapse as a result of unemployment have regained themselves psychologically by starting a small scale business that is self-sustaining and profitable.

Entrepreneur from Christian Perspective

There are some erroneous beliefs in some circles that an entrepreneur can hardly be a genuine religious person. Entrepreneurs are often seen as capitalists who are best tolerated as necessary evils, as they are always in need of a broad and complicated network of controls in order to serve human needs (Scott and Kenman, 2004). From this perspective it is believed that entrepreneurs can hardly tell the truth. Thus, there is inherent negative perception of the entrepreneur in human society.

The Christian perspective of entrepreneurship started from the very beginning. In the dramatic account of creation, every segment of God's work was underlined with a repeated refrain: "God saw that it was good" (Genesis Chapter one). It is thus interesting to know that the material world that God made was attested to be good.

An entrepreneur is therefore, like one who organizes numerous factors and brings things into connection so as to produce what is beneficial to human beings around him. It is this creative aspect of an entrepreneur that is akin to God's creative activity as we saw in the book of Genesis. Being the only creature that was made in the Creator's image, humans are expected to be creative and innovative. So an entrepreneur is an astute participant in the divine call to creativity, innovation and productivity that God gives to the whole human race:

So God made man in his own image, in the image of God created
He him, male and female created he them. And God blessed
them, and
God said unto them be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the
earth
And subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and
over every living...Gen.1:26-28.

In order to exercise these mandates, the entrepreneur must have access to material factors of production. Bolton and Thompson buttress this view by asserting that an entrepreneur is a person who habitually creates and innovates to build something of recognized value around perceived opportunities (2000). Unlike animals that are bound to things by instinct, humans relate to things by reasoning. Humans are self-thinking beings who survive by the use of reasoning. The youth that can successfully be an entrepreneur is one who reasons, thinks constructively and comes out with what can be useful to the society.

Christian ethics greatly supports entrepreneurship. Elisha asked the widow that cried for help “What do you have in the house?” Your maidservant had nothing except a jar of oil” She answered. The instruction that followed was for her to go out and borrow containers from neighbors, then go into the house lock up herself and her sons and fill all the containers after which she should go and sell the oil so that she could pay her debt first, and then feed with the rest(2kings4). The parable of the man that distributed ten talents among his servants is also illustrating Jesus support of entrepreneurship (Mtt.25:14ff). It suggests that every human being on the surface of the earth has been endowed with the means of survival, and each is given according to his or her abilities. Entrepreneurship from the Christian perspective means putting your talents and abilities into profitable use. The Christian Scripture, from which Christian ethics derives its major source enjoins ‘guarding the heart with all diligence for out of it comes issues of life’ (Prov. 4:23). In addition to this, is the declaration that a man who is diligent in his ways sits with men of repute, and never sits with mean men (Prov. 22:29). The Christian culture of clear critical thinking and consistency in business is being emphasized. Initiative and creative thinking are the major factors of entrepreneurship (Bolton and Thompson 2000).

Pope Francis corroborated the need of creative entrepreneurship in the face of the present ‘scandalous poverty’ as a Christian value. In his message in St Peters audience in Vatican, he averred that creative entrepreneurship results in possession. According to the Pontiff, ‘if there is hunger on earth, it is not because food is missing, rather what is lacking is creative entrepreneurship, free and fair sighted entrepreneurship’. These qualities ensure adequate production and solidarity approach, which ultimately ensures fair distribution’, he continued.(2018).

Every Nigerian youth is therefore, expected to discover his /her talent(s) and invest it meaningfully. It is important to note that entrepreneurship is not only trading. It can as well be constructing, crafting, manufacturing or even engagement in contemplative activities. Thus entrepreneurship is all about innovation and creativity that is accompanied with risk taking.(Peter

Drucker,1970). The fact remains that each person has been given something-an innate potential which has to be invested into profitable usefulness. Based on the same parable, Christian religion also reveals that proper investment of our innate potentials and our current exposures through entrepreneurship can make a person to be more useful to the wider society.

Christian Work Ethics and Entrepreneurship

From the foregoing it is obvious that entrepreneurship is not a strange in Christianity. In the language of Okwueze, however, religion and science play complementary roles to each other like two pillars of a house. Though parallel to each other, they support the same structure to prevent a collapse (2012). This is exactly what Christian ethics does to entrepreneurship. While entrepreneurship deals with material facts, ethics deals with values. While harnessing the factors of production around us-time, land, money, machine, man applies his innate abilities for profitable ventures, and Christian ethics provides the moral values that are needed to conduct the business in ways it would be harmless to the person and the wider society. Fundamentally, Christian ethics provide us with the motivation and the guide to embark on entrepreneurship in the first place.

The foundation of the relevance of Christian work ethics to entrepreneurship is enshrined in Calvins ideology of frugality and Max Weber's thesis on protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. The core of Weber's thesis provides a set of beliefs and values about work, savings, investments and acquisition of wealth (Dorius et al 2012). Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism represented a clean break from the old medieval Christian worldview that saw work as a sign of belonging to a low class, and the possession and acquisition of wealth as a violation of ascetic values. Through the philosophy of protestant work ethic, the meaning of work and savings has been redefined; whereby hard work is seen as a dignifying venture and the accrual of material goods as divine.

Protestant work ethic can be so developed to be a part of certain cultures that one does not need to be a religious Calvinist to follow it(Ryken.,2010) .When this ideology was first developed and projected, the impact in the West was great. People were motivated to engage new activities that ultimately ushered in the industrial revolution and a period of economic growth never before seen in human history. It can have the same effect in the present Nigerian society when we begin to see hard work as dignifying instead of continually depending on parents and the government.

Christian Ethical Principles Needed for Entrepreneurial Development Among Nigerian Youths: A case of Students of Imo State University, Owerri

In the course of this study, it was observed that a good number of students of Imo State University are on self-sponsorship. They are engaged in money-yielding activities like trading, manufacturing of things like detergents and antiseptics and services like barbing /braiding. They engage in these entrepreneurial activities while in school. Believing that this is a prototype of Nigerian youths, some discussions were carried out to find out their motivation for embarking on those activities. Effort was also made to find out their views about the application of ethics in business. The summary of the findings are as follows:

- 1) Most of these student entrepreneurs got involved in the various businesses as a stop-gap to enable them sponsor themselves through school. As far as they are concerned, their main objective is to complete their studies and obtain a certificate that will enable them obtain gainful employment, even when they know that the economy cannot provide employment to the army of graduates and potential graduates in their fields of study. For most of them, engaging in small scale businesses is humiliating; therefore it has to be a temporary venture.
- 2) On the issue of applying Christian ethical principles in their businesses, most of the students interviewed still held the general opinion that business and religion cannot go together. Many of them said that they are in business to make money and not to please people. When asked whether they believe that the application of Christian ethical principles in their businesses can help them grow and sustain their businesses, their response was in the negative.

These responses are indication that many youths in Nigeria are yet to understand the importance of imbibing the entrepreneurial behavior. More importantly, they are yet to understand the importance of Christian ethical principles in the development of entrepreneurial behavior.

For Nigerian youths to come to accept and commit themselves to entrepreneurship as a worthwhile venture, the following Christian ethical principles need to be imbibed by not only the youths, but also the society in general:

Principle of Hard work: In the discussion with thirty undergraduates, Seventeen (17) of them believe that it is possible to get the best in life without necessarily working hard. A student boldly claimed that the popular view

currently is hard work does not make a guy but smartness does'. Even parents are now indicting their children of sluggishness when they fail to come home with ill-gotten wealth, even as students. To such parents even the uneducated children in the communities are building houses and buying cars after a short trip. This claim was supported and accentuated by majority of the audience. However, Nigerian youths have to deliberately dis-orientate their mindset from the possibility of achieving success without hard work. This is why there is so much fraud and other corrupt tendencies in Nigeria. Hard work and diligence makes one to live with confidence. Calvin Coolidge says "All growth depends upon activity. There is no development physically or intellectually without effort, and effort means work". Thus through hard work and perseverance and a faith in God, you can live your dream (Ben Carson). Pope Paul VI corroborates this fact by saying "All life demands struggle. Those who have everything given to them become lazy, selfish and insensitive to the real values of life. The very striving and hard work we constantly try to avoid is the major building block in the person we are today.

Principle of Creativity: Entrepreneurship is all about creativity. Creativity is one of the most important qualities an entrepreneur can have (Fallon, 2014). Creativity is a boundless imagination that is constantly innovating and always seeing the world through different lenses. Scholars have come to believe that it is the ultimate key to business success. Creativity comes easy when the mind is divested of all negative encumbrances. Psychology researchers have come to discover that addiction to pornographic materials and sexual perversions impede creativity and innovation. Creative efforts bring happiness (Roosevelt), just as God delighted in his creativity in Genesis 1:31.

Boldness: This is a virtue that any entrepreneur must have. According to the Aristotelian *Golden mean*, boldness is the middle course between cowardice and rashness in decision making (Okeke, 2015). It takes boldness to venture into the unknown terrain of entrepreneurship.

Honesty: This is the virtue that will encourage your prospective clients to relate with you in confidence. Entrepreneurship involves so much risk. Risk taking among the stakeholders to any business is possible when there is considerable level of honesty.

Frugality: This is the ability to always check and cross check one's spending. This virtue keeps one away from unnecessary extravagance and ensures that every spending is rationally made. It builds in one, the ability to bargain effectively and enhances the savings culture. Earning and spending less from your income will help your enterprise to grow. Ruthlessly cut away from the unimportant and focus on the important.

Time Management: When one loses the control of his time it reflects in his disorganized life. An entrepreneur who is multitalented and enormously intelligent can squander it all if he is unable to seize control of his time. A good entrepreneur does what Gordon calls time budgeting. He knows the difference between fixed and discretionary desires (Gordon, 1988). Just as in financial budgeting, a good entrepreneur allocates more time in fixed or necessities and less time on discretionary issues or pleasures. He makes the best of every minute because time is a scarce commodity. He sets goals for himself. This is what Calvinism referred to as discipline in Protestant ethics.

Conclusion

Christian ethics is different from Christian doctrine in the sense that it considers the Christian society as the agent in well-doing as they respond to the dictates and commandments of God, whereas doctrine studies God as the doers of all things whose authority is to be studied, obeyed and handed down. The import of this study can be summarized in parts. First contextualizing the study among Imo State University students appear to the researcher as a novel enterprise. While it constitutes a new dimension to be added in the study of religion and economic behavior, students of various citadels of learning should be encouraged to embark on profitable ventures in addition to being religious as they pursue academic excellence. Currently, religious activities are relatively high in the university environment so is entrepreneurial participation but it is not commensurate to the level of moral values of students. The apparent entrepreneurial participation is informed more by the harsh effects of poverty than a response to Christian ethical principle of hard work. This paper goes further to posit that religious ethics, especially Christian ethics is a strong tool in the process of developing youth entrepreneurial orientation in Nigeria and in the achievement of the highly averred sustainable development.

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