

**THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN RELIGIOUS MOBILIZATION
IN RURAL-URBAN CITIES: A Comparative Study of the Religious life of the
people of the South East of Nigeria.**

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Abstract

There is a common assumption among the adherents of Religious Market Theory that there is always an increase in the overall religiosity in an environment with high religious diversity. On the other hand, Secularization Hypothesis holds that the establishment of new religions casts doubt on the existing religion, which results in a reduction of religiosity. In contributing to this debate, which is the main purpose of this paper, a comparative analysis was used to reinvestigate the relationship that existed between religious diversity and religiosity among religious adherents especially in rural-urban cities of the South East of Nigeria. This is done with a view of proffering a more index knowledge of the relationship that exists between the two variables. Findings from the study discovered that Urbanization increases levels of religious mobilization; and that diversity also increases levels of religious mobilization. The paper while supporting Religious Market Theory, maintained that urban areas are far more likely than rural areas to actively participate in religion and that religious diversity causes level of activity and participation to increase too. In conclusion, the paper recommended among other things that government should encourage religious freedom among citizens, which will promote religious diversity and more active participation.

Keywords: Religious diversity, Religious Market theory, Secularization Hypothesis, Religiosity, Religious economies.

Introduction

Freedom of religion is one of the basic human rights in Nigeria as enshrined in Nigerian constitution (see Chap. 4 section

38). What is the consequence of this freedom of choice, does it increase religious involvement? Or does it undermine people's closeness to their

religion and therefore reduce religiosity? It seems that there are plausible arguments to answer both questions with 'yes'. In fact, in the literature on economics of religion both questions have actually been answered with 'yes'. The part of the literature that gives an affirmative answer to the first question adheres to the Religious Market Theory; while the part that gives an affirmative answer to the second question adheres to the Secularization Hypothesis.

The position of this article is that the received wisdom about the relationship between cities and religion as presented by the advocates of the Secularization Hypothesis is a nostalgic myth. It therefore maintains that urban areas are far more likely than rural areas to actively participate in religion and that diversity causes levels of activity and participation to increase. To this end, the paper examines the role of religious diversity in religious mobilization in the rural-urban cities of the South-East of Nigeria, in order to understand link between the religious diversity of communities and their degree of religious mobilization.

Religious Economies

Religious economy refers to religious persons and organizations interacting within a market framework of competing

groups and ideologies (Stark, 2007). An economy makes it possible for religious suppliers to meet the demands of different religious consumers (Robertson, et al, 1985). By offering an array of religions and religious products, a competitive religious economy stimulates such activity in a market-type setting (Robertson, et al, 1985). The field applies rational choice theory to the theory of religion such that supply and demand are used to model the development and success of organized religions (Stark, 2007).

The idea of religious economy frames religion as a product and as those who practice or identify with any particular religion as a consumer. But when the idea of belief is brought into the equation, this definition expands, and ideology affects the "product" and who "consumes" it.

Religious Market Theory

According to the theory, religious diversity gives the population a wide variety of choices in religion and leads to a religious economy in which different religious organizations compete for followers, much the way businesses compete for consumers in a commercial economy. The theory focuses attention on religious suppliers and whether religious firms have the ability to increase the demand for religion (Young, 1997). In a free market, or pluralistic religious

market, many religious organizations exist and seek to appeal to certain segments of the market. Organizations in a free market cannot rely on the state for resources so they must compete for participation of the religious consumer. Contest among religious firms results in the specialization of products so that consumers are able to distinguish different organization from others. Pluralism is only possible through lack of favoritism by the state. A competitive and pluralistic religious economy has a positive effect on levels of participation (Young, 1997).

In pursuit of a theoretical proposition about religious movements, this paper adopts the notion of the religious economy especially as proposed by Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge (1985). Deductions from these scholars' theory of religion suggest that, to the degree a religious market is unregulated, diversity will thrive. That is, the "natural" state of religious economies is one in which a variety of religious groups successfully cater to the special interests of specific market segments. This arises because of the inherent inability of a single religious organization to be at once worldly and other-worldly, while the market will always contain distinct consumer segments seeking more and less worldly versions of faith. Indeed,

because of this underlying differentiation of consumer preferences, religious economies never can be successfully monopolized, even when a religious organization is backed by the state. Even at the height of its temporal power, the medieval Church was surrounded by heresy and dissent (Johnson 1976; Stark and Bainbridge 1985). Of course, when repression is great, religions competing with the state-sponsored monopoly will be forced to operate underground. But whenever and wherever repression falters, lush diversity breaks through.

This paper parts company with Peter Berger on the consequences of outbreaks of diversity. Along with most sociologists, he believes in the superior organizational power of monopoly faiths: by providing the people with a single plausibility structure, the monopoly religion can inspire the kind of deep faith we often associate with the medieval village. Here is precisely where this paper thinks the nostalgic errors enter. There is ample evidence that in societies with at least a putative monopoly faith, religious indifference is rife. Contrary conceptions of religious commitment in earlier eras are simply wrong. Historians of the medieval church now recognize that huge areas often were nearly untouched by Church influence (Johnson 1976). And today, close inspection of the religious situation

in most nations where "everyone" is a Roman Catholic for instance, reveals levels of religious participation that are astoundingly low.

However, in each instance religion has served as the primary institution of political resistance to external domination. In effect, religious participation in these societies proves commitment to nationalism. The inability of the monopoly religious denomination to mobilize massive commitment is inherent in the segmentation of any religious market. The fact is that a single faith cannot shape its appeal to precisely suit the needs of one market segment, without sacrificing its appeal to another. In contrast, where many faiths function within a religious economy, a high degree of specialization occurs. It follows that many religious bodies will, together, be able to meet the demands of a much larger proportion of a population than can be the case where only one or very few faiths have free access.

Moreover, in faith as in finance, monopoly firms will be lazy. Since religious monopolies can only exist as creatures of state power, monopoly faiths are not exposed to market forces. In contrast, in an unregulated religious economy, faiths seek to maximize their efforts to attract and to hold members-

those that can't compete will disappear. The more diversity, the greater the religious mobilization of the population-the more people there are who will be committed to a faith. Put another way, the more highly specialized and aggressive the Churches are, the greater the odds that any given individual will be activated. Some will object that this is participation, not faith, and that full and active Churches are not the same thing as a society in which all partake of a unitary sacred canopy. But that line of thought implies that religion is stronger where it is neglected than where members are willing to commit much time, money, and attention. Our disagreement with the advocates of Secularization Hypothesis on the impact of urbanism and diversity on religion is summed up by the following propositions. Other things being equal, (1) Urbanization increases levels of religious mobilization; and (2) diversity increases levels of religious mobilization.

Secularization Hypothesis and Religious Market Theory

Prior to the emergence of the theory of religious economy some scholars of religion, such as Steve Bruce (1999), believed that modernization would lead inevitably to the erosion of religiosity. These sociologists predicted the disappearance of religion from Earth, based on the decline in religious belief and

observance in Western Europe. However, according to the theory of religious economy, societies that restrict supply of religion, either through an imposed state religious monopoly or through state-sponsored secularization, are the main causes of drops in religiosity (Young, 1997). Correspondingly, the more religions a society has, the more likely the population is to be religious (Rodney, 2007). This is refuted by the secularization hypothesis, by stating that if a liberal religious community is tolerant of a wide array of belief, then they are less likely to hold certain beliefs in common, so nothing can be shared and reified in a community context. If nothing is shared, then nothing is shunned, and there is thus a loss in observance of modern liberal traditions (Bruce, 1999).

It is not surprising that modern sociologists expect the religious diversity of the city to lead to the decline of religion. In his famous treatise on suicide, Emile Durkheim (1951) condemns urban diversity as both cause and consequence of the breakdown of moral integration. Where multiple religious groups compete he maintains, each discredits the other and encourages the view that religion per se is open to question, dispute, and doubt. Durkheim believes that, in societies where there are multiple religious options, people are cast adrift in a sea of moral

uncertainty, which, in turn, produces all manner of social pathologies (Durkheim, 1951).

In similar fashion, Berger (1967) argues that diversity fractures the "sacred canopy" of a society—a canopy that exists only when all (or nearly all) members of a society assent to "One True Faith". Although Berger is speaking of religious plausibility structures and not religious institutions, he does not exclude the institutional church from this religious crisis. Indeed, in his more recent book, *The Heretical Imperative* (1979), Berger clearly states his position: "Modernity has plunged religion into a very specific crisis, characterized by secularity, to be sure, but characterized more importantly by diversity. In the diversity situation the authority of all religious traditions tends to be undermined (1979, p. xi)". Diversity forces religious plausibility structures to compete and deprives all religions "of their status as taken-for-granted" (1967, p. 151). For Berger, diversity forces religions to compete, and this competition forces all religions into a market situation, a situation he views as threatening to the future of religion.

This paper while agreeing with Berger that diversity forces religions to compete for adherents, maintains that competition is a stimulus for religious growth and not

an avenue for its demise.

Urbanization and Religious Mobilization

At the turn of the century, the population of the urban cities of the South-East of Nigeria had experienced several decades of explosive growth. Some of this growth was the result of rural-urban migration. Did these migrants leave their Church affiliation behind as they fled the quiet piety of rural life for the worldliness of the city? Not at all. Observation revealed that religious participation was higher in the cities than in the surrounding small villages and hinterlands.

From a practical stand-point, it is much easier to attend Church in an urban area than in a rural area. All cities have churches, but the lower population density of rural areas often makes it hard to sustain Churches. Even when there were rural churches, people often had to travel relatively long distances to reach them. It also has to be kept in mind the degree to which rural residents formed small, relatively closed networks impervious to social pressures or outside attachments. These closed networks often sustained various forms of quiet deviance, lack of religion being among the least serious. Another factor is, of course, diversity. Urbanites in the South-East of Nigeria always have a much greater range of available choices, and they have always

been exposed to more intensive recruitment efforts through religious diversity.

The Role of Diversity in Religious Mobilization

Observation from our discussion so far, has shown that religious diversity is strong predictor of religious participation and mobilization. As expected, the diversity of the religious market increases the rate of adherents in a given city. Mass religious participation depends in this view upon the degree of pluralist competition among diverse religious organizations. This process actively recruits members of mass congregations, at least in types of faith based on communal forms of worship. Hence the strength of religiosity in the rural-urban cities South-East of Nigeria is explained by the rich diversity of churches, sects, and mosques actively striving to attract members.

Yet, research suggests that religious adherence in a community is also influenced by the social context of the religious market (Welch (1983). This finding is consistent with numerous studies that have found migration to have negative effects on all forms of religious participation (Wuthnow and Christiano 1979; Welch and Baltzell 1983; Finke 1987). But how does religious diversity increase the rate of adherents? Around the mid- 19th century, revival meetings was the most apparent answer, for Protestants and Catholics alike (Dolan 1978; McLoughlin 1978). But after the Civil War, revivals were not the only evangelical tool used for recruitment. As Winthrop Hudson explains, "the other great evangelistic enterprise of the Protestant churches was the Sunday

school movement. Within a very brief time, the Sunday school-benefiting from its surge of popularity-had begun to replace revivalism as the primary recruiting device of the churches (1981, pp. 236-37)." By 1906, the Sunday school movement was not merely an educational program for small children, but a movement designed to recruit new adult members and renew the commitment of the current membership.

How this movement influenced the religious diversity of the rural-urban cities of South-East of Nigeria? Investigation revealed the powerful effects of religious diversity on the Sunday school movement. As the diversity of the religious market increases, the rate of Sunday school activity also increases.

More so, competition is another major factor of religious participation in the rural-urban cities South-East of Nigeria inclusive. For instance, while Catholics did not develop a strong Sunday school program in the South-East of Nigeria, their presence stimulated the growth of Protestant Sunday schools. Once again, this suggests a powerful Protestant reaction to their perceptions of the Catholic threat. When the competition provided by religious diversity and the threat of Catholics increased, the evangelical efforts of the Protestants - via their Sunday schools - also increased. Therefore, religious diversity plays a vital

role on the rate of adherents by increasing the rate of Sunday schools, as well as the rate of religious participation. Thus, religious diversity not only increases religious participation by appealing to a broader segment of the market, it also increases competition and forces Churches to develop effective membership recruitment and retention techniques, such as the Sunday school.

Evaluation

Findings from our discussion so far strongly suggest that the received wisdom about the effects of urbanism and diversity on religion especially as presented by secularization theory may be wrong. If so, the question arises as to how these views became enshrined as self-evident truths in the recent past? This paper is of the view that this occurred because the myth of pastoral piety served the interests of both Catholic and radical European intellectuals. For a long time, Catholic writers presented the Reformation as a terrible catastrophe that shattered the moral integration of Western Civilization, eventually giving rise to such subsequent catastrophes as the French Revolution and the rise of Marxism. Implicit is the assumption that a universal church is not only theologically preferable, but also socially necessary. Explicit is the claim that faith has crumbled since the golden days of the

High Renaissance when all Europeans walked secure in faith and grace. Similarly, the notion of decline fits with radical claims that the rise of science and rationalism is breaking the mystical spell that has held humanity in hostage.

From the start, the social sciences have taken for granted the decline and eventual disappearance of religion. Perhaps no single social science thesis has come as close to universal acceptance as the belief that modernism dooms faith. Anthony F.C. Wallace undoubtedly spoke for most of his colleagues when he confidently wrote in his celebrated book on the anthropology of religion that ". . . the evolutionary future of religion is extinction . . . belief in supernatural powers is doomed to die out, all over the world as a result of the increasing adequacy and diffusion of scientific knowledge . . . the process is inevitable" (1966, p. 265). This dire prediction seemed almost untenable as urban centers grew and religious pluralism mushroomed. And so, findings in this paper indicate that both urbanism and diversity contributed to an increase in religious mobilization.

Findings in this paper are not the first to dispute the secularization thesis. An unbiased examination of the empirical findings reported during the past decade

does not support claims about the great decline in piety (Bell 1980; Stark 1981; Bahr 1982; Perkins 1984; Robertson and Chirico 1985; Hammond 1985; Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Hadden 1987). Simply because piety varies by time and place does not mean that the past was more pious than the present. Mass attendance probably was not high in medieval times. Illegitimacy was rife in communities said to be unanimously Catholic and pious (Wrigley 1969).

Conclusion

Contrary to the pleas of the clergy and the pronouncements of social scientists, the city is surprisingly sacred and diversity is friend, not foe, to religious mobilization. This paper argued that the city not only offers easy access to churches, it also offers a variety of churches, all competing for adherents. Some sociologists have suggested that the competition of an open religious economy will undermine all forms of religious commitment, but this paper has argued that this competition has facilitated religious mobilization. Religious diversity increased the rate of adherence in a city. Not only did this factor have a direct effect on the rate of adherence, it also had indirect effects by increasing the evangelical efforts of some Christian religious activities like Protestant Sunday schools. Thus, a natural consequence of an open religious

economy is a religious diversity that forces each religious body to appeal successfully to some segment of the religious market, or to slide into extinction. The paper is therefore concluded with a clarion call to government to encourage religious freedom among citizens, which will promote religious diversity and more active participation.

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